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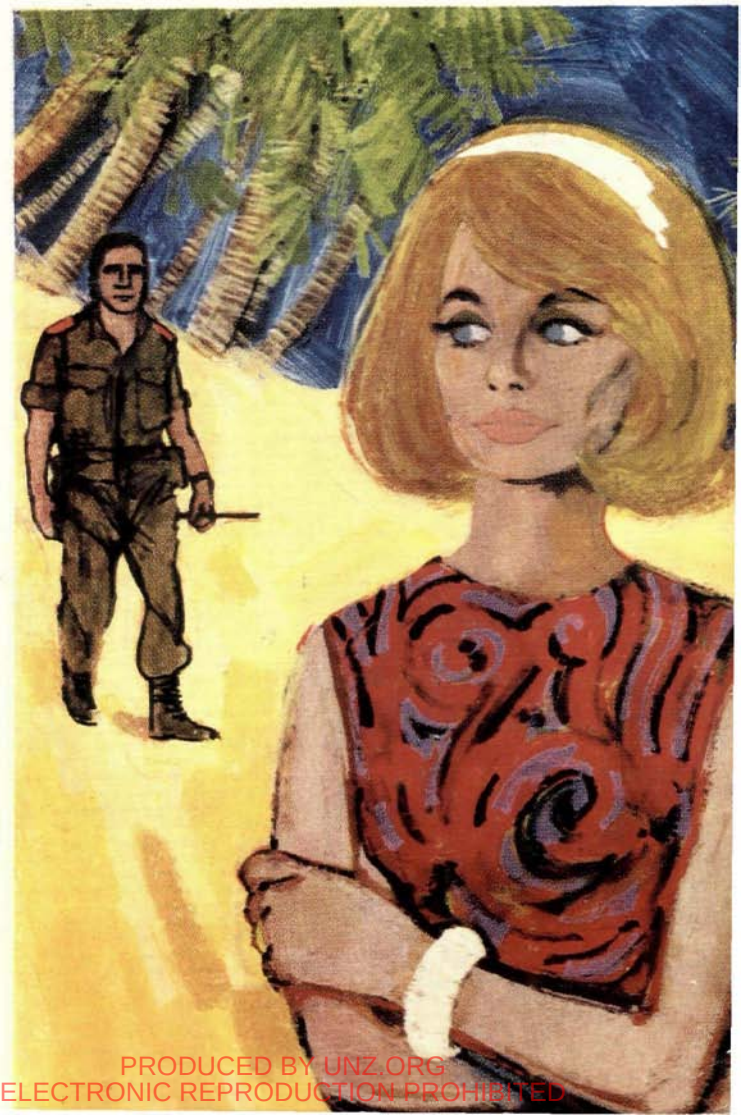

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Vol. XXVI No. 12 DECEMBER 1965

Over Now to You		2
A Long Day's Dying	William Eastlake *Illustration by Bill Linden*	4
Clubmanship!	Vivian Ellis *Illustrations by John Jensen*	19
Fancy Man	Leone Stewart *Illustrations by Mary Dinsdale*	26
The Cornish Farm	Winston Graham	37
The Greatest Thing in the World	Norman Mailer	48
Pub Crawl		62
Mr. Catesby Brings It Off	John Moore	65
The Nelson Touch	E. L. Malpass *Illustrations by Pete*	80
Anniversary	R. C. Hutchinson *Illustration by Jon Davis*	91
Accident at the County Fair	William Saroyan	101
The Colonists	Rupene Ruapapere *Illustration by Clyde Pearson*	106
Girl Who Stopped a War	Lionel Davidson	113
Memory is a Small Shell	Gwyn Griffin *Cover by M. Whittlesea*	126
Leisure-Pleasure: Wine, Books and Cars		160
Argosy Crossword		168

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People in argosy

E. L. Malpass is a bank manager by day and a writer by night. He is a leading figure in his Nottingham community; a happily married man; a sidesman at his church. His stories, however, are full of extraordinary people in way-out situations, widely at variance with their author's local life.

In the eleven years that Eric Malpass has been writing—since winning a short story competition—he has become a firm friend of Argosy readers. His latest short story starts on page 80 and his new novel, *Morning's at Seven*, is reviewed in Leisure-Pleasure. To relax, Malpass reads *War and Peace* ("I've been doing this since 1959") and fights a valiant cold war with the ever-flourishing weeds in his garden.

William Eastlake is the author of the superbly-written story, *A Long Day's Dying* which opens on page 4. Eastlake is a New Yorker by birth but has travelled and studied in France, Italy and England. Returning to the United States a few years ago, he and his American wife bought a ranch in New Mexico. Here he raises cattle and horses, and works unceasingly for the rights and survival of the Navajo Indians.

Leone Stewart has one unswerving ambition; to have a play of hers presented simultaneously in London's West End and on Broadway. To date, three of her plays, although well-received, didn't get beyond the London perimeter.

She lives by the river at Sunbury-on-Thames, writing novels, film scripts, plays and short stories, venturing out to visit stately homes and to give talks to authors' clubs.

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Gwyn Griffin was born in Egypt but was educated in England. During the war he served in Africa and later became a police officer on the Red Sea coastline. After the war he found himself in Australia and, for no apparent reason, was bitten by the writing bug. Thereupon he decided to become a novelist and return to England. Somehow he got sidetracked in Rome and he and his wife made their home in a small town south of Rome.

Griffin is a master of the taut, suspenseful narrative. He has an uncanny way of illuminating complex relationships. *Memory is a Small Shell*, on page 126, projects a whole world through the reaction of its characters.

Vivian Ellis is described in *Who's Who* as Composer, Author. These are just two facets of Mr. Ellis. Educated at Cheltenham College, he went on to study the piano under Dame Myra Hess. However, his concert appearances were few since his gambling instincts (inherited from his grandfather) took over. Ellis discovered that he had a flair for the stock market and decided this would be his career. As a second string he began composing music and writing lyrics for the London theatre. The theatre paid the dividends; the market didn't.

The war interrupted things—but only temporarily. Ellis emerged from the navy as a lieutenant commander and the composer of *Bless the Bride*, a hit musical which he did in collaboration with Sir Alan Herbert.

With the proceeds of the show he restarted stock-market operations. This time the second string was writing and he did it with the same golden touch. When last heard of, Vivian Ellis—composer, author, lyric writer, financier and humorist—was embarking on yet another career. Painting!

Winston Graham believes the highest form of fiction is that of the novel, provided it tells a story. Graham's novels all tell stories, and nine of them have been bought by film companies. Remember the Hitchcock success, *Marnie*?

Born in Manchester, Winston Graham is an inveterate traveller and his books and short stories reflect the different aspects of life he has absorbed *en route* from one place to another. At the moment he is stationary, in a Sussex house with his wife and two children. Here he wrote his most recent novel, *After the Act*, and the short story on page 37.

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A Long Day's Dying

He did not cry, he wanted to behave now like a man

by WILLIAM EASTLAKE

THE summer solstice was another implacable, fierce, pure blue New Mexican day, another wide panorama of empty, impossible void without faint sign or distant signal for the very young man dying at the bottom of a vast and lonely canyon called the La Jara Arroyo. Quicksand. The young man tried to remove the word from his thoughts. Quicksand, a viscid, unsubstantial whorl—phantom. Neither is quicksand fluid nor solid; neither can you stand nor swim. *Quicksand*, the stuff a nightmare and the rest of my life is made of.

But try to think of something else, try to think of something pleasant to pass this short time. Think of your Indian friend and the day you said to Rabbit Stockings, "How many chiefs are there in that summer wickiup?"

"It's not that wickiup, it's my home."

"How many chiefs are there?"

"Plenty. You know, Santo, you've got to stop thinking like a white person."

"That's going to be difficult."

"You've got to try. You know, the whites are going to be extincted."

"What's that?"

"Blown up. Isn't that what you're trying to do?"

"Are we?"

"Sure. And when you're all gone and then you try to come back again, we Indians are not going to be so nice next time."

"You Indians are not going to let the next Columbus land here?"

"That's right, Santo."

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The boy Sant thought about this odd, unimportant conversation. He had a great deal of time to think now, so he let his mind wander over all of his short, rich past, because he had tried everything to keep from sinking, but nothing worked. The thing that seemed to work best was to lie back and try to float on the cool boiling sand. That seemed to work best, but each long alone hour that passed he was getting in deeper. It's a grave. It's as though the earth wanted you, decided to take you now, could not wait for you to become a man.

So Sant did not whine or complain; he did not cry, because he wanted to behave now like a man. When you have tried absolutely everything else and there is no way out, then you try resignation and courage. Quicksand is heavy water in which swimming is impossible and it's as if the drain below were open and you were being sucked down into the earth. Sant had been struggling alone down at the bottom of the lonely *arroyo* for six hours now.

Six hours before, he had begun to cross on his great black horse and the animal had refused. Sant got off and tried to pull the horse, but Luto stood rooted on the edge. Sant did not notice that he himself was going down, he did not realise it was impossible to move until the rein broke and the horse moved back to firmer ground. "All right," Sant called to the horse, "when I get out of here—!" But the young man was already descending like a slow elevator.

It was not until the quicksand reached his chest that he realised the horse might go for ever unpunished. What had the horse done? Behaved sensibly, that's all. But they had crossed at this point at the bottom of this *arroyo* many times. "Yes, but I know—" Sant tried to go more on his back—"I know," he said to the sky, "that quicksand moves. It needs water to percolate from below the sand like a spring, and at this exact spot of the percolation it will keep the sand in suspension and trap anything that enters. But this spot changes."

Why had he entered? To get on the other side. That horse, Luto, continues to brood there in the shadow of the *arroyo*, continues to wait for me to finish whatever I am up to. I wonder if he knows I'm drowning. Maybe he suspects there's something wrong. Then why doesn't he go back to the corral with his empty saddle so they will know that something happened to me? Because I did not train him. That's the last time I'll neglect a horse. Yes, it's the last time you'll neglect anything. It's the last time you'll even think about it.

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Sant splashed the water with his arm as it flowed around him on its way to the Rio Grande.

If I was four hundred yards up the *arroyo* I would be on the other side of the Continental Divide and die into the Pacific. Now I am dying into the Rio Grande and the Atlantic. It's the last time you'll die into anything. It's the first and last time. Wait. They will find me. How? They will miss me and track me here. How are they going to track you over all those hard sand rock formations between here and the house? Well then, Rabbit Stockings will know where I am. How would any Indian know where you are? Particularly one as brainless as Rabbit Stockings. Because Indians have got a lot of intuition. The less brains the more intuition?

Sant said abruptly, "Oh God!" aloud up into the sky and then resumed his dialogue with himself. He was swimming gently and softly in fluid earth to keep taking air and he was talking to himself to beat the death that tugged on him from somewhere there below.

What about the time you tamed the thunder? It will be the last time for that too. I don't think the thunder will be tamed any more. The time all of the Indians convinced you—Afraid Of His Own Horses, and Rabbit Stockings was in on it too—the time they convinced you that if you could climb a high enough ridge and shoot enough arrows, throw enough rocks into the air and shout horrible shouts, the thunder would go away and never come back. It worked. That's right. As we flew along the high pine-crested ridge hollering and shooting, the thunder paid us back. Remember, it sent a bolt of lightning that nearly killed Rabbit Stockings when it shattered a tree that Rabbit Stockings was shouting under. It all proves that there is something in the Indian religion of worshipping things, and it proves that things don't like us very much. I must ask Rabbit Stockings if they worship quicksand. I will never get the chance.

The sun was fire-hot on the young man's face but he had to lie back in this position to present as much body surface as he could to the fluid sand. At times he could relieve his burning face with his wet hands but very quickly because he had to use them as flippers, swinging them gently to stay alive.

On the great haunch of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains that rose like another planet above the flat *arroyo*-cut land there were two riders appearing like centaurs at a distance.

"Rabbit Stockings," Big Sant said, "it's a superstition or

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something you dreamed up, I don't know which." The man called Big Sant, who didn't know which, was the father of the boy at the bottom of the *arroyo*. He had a very wide open face and a sharp, red, alive scar on his left jaw.

"I just have this feeling that Santo did not go to the mountains."

"But feeling is not enough, Rabbit Stockings."

"I have this feeling that he went the other way. Something happened to him."

"What happened?"

"He drowned."

"In the small stream from the spring in the *arroyo*? It would be quite a trick."

"Well, I've got this feeling." The young Indian who had this feeling was a Navajo Indian, about the same age as his partner at the bottom of the *arroyo*. He dressed like all the other Indians in this part of New Mexico—that is, he dressed like a cowboy except the way his bun of hair was tied at the back. Cowboys didn't do that. It saves on barber's bills, Big Sant thought. But he couldn't take this Indian seriously about his son at the bottom of the *arroyo*.

The Indian religion was part of their way of life that the white man had not been able to make a dent in. The Indians still insisted on getting their inspiration from their guardian spirit. Sometimes it was a bear, an elk, or even a certain pine tree isolated and clinging to a ledge on the mesa which they would watch from below each day. Sometimes it was only a rock, a large yellow concretion about to tumble from a ledge, threatening and high.

"Where did you get your information, Rabbit Stockings?"

"From a snake."

"I thought so. We will continue up the mountain." And he touched his horse to increase their pace to a trot, the Indian keeping up on his matching Appaloosa that had to work hard to maintain the pace. They had been travelling for about an hour now, ever since Big Sant decided that Little Sant must have got into some kind of difficulty. Not serious. Probably a lame horse. Indians are alarmists.

Little Sant was overdue about six hours on his trip up the mountain to gather the horses, and one hour ago the *remuda* had come in by themselves without the boy. A strange stallion had gathered up their mares and taken them to the mountain, but it must still be too cold on the Sangre de Cristos at ten thousand feet this time in June so their mares must have turned

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tail and fled back down to the ranch as soon as the stallion dropped his vigilance. The stallion was not bad, but the warm weather down here must be better. But what happened to the boy? What happened to Little Sant? Probably his horse went lame. Don't ask Rabbit Stockings; Indians are alarmists. "You are, you know, Rabbit Stockings."

"What's that?"

"You want to make a big thing out of nothing. Does the peace pipe go from right to left or from left to right?"

"What's a peace pipe?"

"You see, you have got over many of your superstitions. Why don't you get over the rest?"

"If an Indian believes something it's called superstition; when a white man believes something it's called progress."

"How did you figure that, Rabbit Stockings?"

"Why it's everywhere around you," Rabbit Stockings said carefully. "It's everywhere around you. Aren't they going to the moon now? Well, the white man doesn't even know the earth. What do they know about quicksand?"

"Little Sant didn't go that way, Rabbit Stockings." Big Sant was annoyed at this pecking away at the ridiculous. Indians will never let a thing go, particularly if it's a prejudice. This Indian had no evidence for his belief.

"You still didn't tell me what is quicksand."

"It's caused by water rising from below a table of sand. This causes a turbid—"

"What's that mean?"

"Something that is neither water nor sand, Rabbit Stockings. You can't swim in it, neither can you get any purchase on it to get out. You founder and die."

"There's nothing down there pulling you below? Nothing that wants you? Something that says, *now is the time*?"

"No, Rabbit Stockings. It's like your snake again. There is nothing to it."

"Nothing to it," Rabbit Stockings repeated, bouncing on his smaller horse. "Nothing to it. Another Indian superstition. Well, maybe you're right," Rabbit Stockings announced suddenly. "After all, we didn't chase away the thunder."

"Try to remember that, Rabbit Stockings," Big Sant said.

The young man sinking into eternity at the bottom of the *arroyo* was looking up at the soft grey-green slopes that led away to the world and thinking small thoughts to fight the insidious and larger thoughts as he lay dying.

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Another thing about Indians, Little Sant thought, another thing about Indians is they don't plan for the future. Their future is now. Why plan for something that's happening? You notice this in the Navajo language, the past becomes the future and the present dissolves into their language mist of the day before yesterday. Navajos don't communicate, they confuse. No wonder they don't believe in progress. They couldn't tell you if they did, so it's more comfortable for the Navajos not to believe in the future. I bet they would pass a law against the future if they could—if they believed in laws.

I remember Rabbit Stockings touching his head and saying, the future is here. In other words, the future isn't. It's another idea. That true? Yes, I guess it is. So why should we waste time with the future if it doesn't exist? Progress is part of the future, so that's a waste of time too. Right? Words, words, words. Now your snakes. Snakes exist, don't they? Bears, deer, elk, coyotes—they're real, really real. Right?

Really real. Right. Anything you say, Rabbit Stockings. And then the boy with the red hair, in the quicksand at the bottom of the long, deep, lonely *arroyo* cried suddenly up into the big, empty space, "But get me out! Find me, if your magic works." It was a quiet cry with no attempt to reach anyone, a cry to himself and the quiescent spirit of the rocks and sage, yucca and grey sad tamarisk that wept towards the Rio Grande. But there is no-one, the young man thought. There is no spirit, no life, no death—no death outside this one right here. It's only a word until it happens to you. Where is the horse, Luto? I can see him there in the half shadows. Luto seems waiting for me to get it over with so he can carry me away. Was he in on this too? Was this exact time and place absolutely and perfectly arranged to the second?

Luto is all black, a pure black horse. I never did like that horse waiting there in the chequered shade of the funeral tamarisk. But there was an understanding, there was always an understanding that he was the best horse in the country, the fastest, the quickest, and the best cow horse in the country. We were never friendly. We never spoke. I should have sold him, but when I had a customer, Luto disappeared as though he knew. And I never bought him; that day he just showed up, unbranded, little more than a colt, but he knew everything, wasn't even green broke but he behaved like a ten-year-old, I wonder where he came from and where he will go back to now?

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Little Sant felt himself sink a little more into the heavy fluid sand. He waved his slim arms, fluttered them like a wounded bird, but he could feel himself being pulled down deeper. No, no, no, he told himself. You are behaving like an Indian, thinking like a Navajo. You've been around them too long, like father, like Big Sant says, you should associate more with white boys. But where did the funeral-black horse come from? Why does Luto wait there in the solemn dappled shadows, and where is he going soon?

Sant ceased all movement and Luto emerged out of the shadow tentatively, the black horse bringing the shade, the darkness with him. Death is a cessation of movement, but more, the young man thought, life is the idea of movement. Death is a coffin-black horse, a shadow interlaced among the shadows in the tamarisk. And it wasn't my idea to cross this *arroyo* at this point, it was Luto who pushed down and across in that steady, stately stride, refusing only at the last second, and it was again Luto that flew, almost airborne, down Blind Wolf Canyon to bring us around at the back of the ranch so that even Rabbit Stockings in his infinite stupidity would not select this *arroyo* as a place to search.

But it was Luto with terrific, almost deathless delicacy, who had been able to cut out a calf from its mother, a colt from a stallion, and charge from cover, then whip a mule deer to the mesa and in the snow gambol like a hoyden with a jack until the rabbit, wraithlike in the matching frost, would founder in abject capitulation to the dark mountain that moved like a cougar. The sudden darkness of Luto ascending, then descending the pine-feathered slopes of the Sangre de Cristos like a writhing storm, sombre and wild. Yes, the young man thought: Luto, yes, Luto is alive. Luto is the best horse.

Now watch. Luto, the shadow, has moved out of the tamarisk shadows, moving catlike, moving over here, the young man thought. Because I have been silent, ceased to struggle for seconds, now Luto is moving in. I will wait and when his tail passes by I will grab it and hold on. I will foil the horse. I will make it out of here.

The young man did not believe this, he had been settling in the quicksand for too long now to have grand hope. Little Sant's helplessness had long since turned to hopelessness, but against utter despair he told himself, I will make it out, I will make it out, as the horse nuzzled forward, fretting its monster nose towards the young man in long sweeping casts, but treading delicately in the beginning soft sand, trailing the broken

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reins like a shroud. Then Luto jerked up his head in discovery and wheeled to escape as Little Sant's arms rose to catch the flying, gossamer tail. He had it in his hands. It was like threads of ice, new-forming, fragile ice that exploded in his grip and Luto was gone. Now Luto came slowly back, then stopped ten feet away—Luto staring out of the beginning darkness, merging again into the shadows, spectral and huge.

"Luto!" Sant called weakly. "Luto!" Little Sant felt himself settling more into the quicksand. "Luto boy, what's happening?"

The pair of horsemen moving fast up the precipitous slope merged with mountain mahogany, then fled between brakes of aspen, trampling columbine, mariposa lilies, found a trail strewn red with gilias that led straight to the peaks, then entered a lowering and ominous cloud.

"Do you know what day it is, Rabbit Stockings?" Big Sant asked.

"Shrove Tuesday? The day after tomorrow? The day before yesterday? Ash Wednesday? What other days have you invented?"

"Invent one yourself."

"Can I?"

"It's may I, Rabbit Stockings."

"Sure you can," Rabbit Stockings said. "You whites are always doing it."

"Today is the day, three years to the day, we got Luto. I remember because it's the summer solstice."

"What's that?"

"The twenty-first of June."

"I mean, what's the summer solstice."

"It's the longest day and the shortest night of the year."

Rabbit Stockings thought about this as they cantered through bowers of ponderosa, then debouched into a quiet explosion of orange Cowboy's Delight on the old Circle B, ringed with high wavering Indian Paintbrush midst the gaunt and verdigrised collapse of a homestead, a monument to unhardihood and puerile myth; but some eastern hollyhocks rose in towering, weedlike formidability from out of New England ruins in the yellow New Mexican sky. Rabbit Stockings plucked one as he passed and placed the garish Boston flower in his black Indian head-knot.

"You see," Rabbit Stockings said, in sham Indian solemnity, "I've been thinking about your summer solstice. It could be

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the twenty-first but it could be the twenty-second because it seems to my thick Indian head that both days share that shortest night."

"Yes," Big Sant touched his head and blew out a forced breath, annoyed, and the Appaloosa horse started in sympathy. "Yes, but it was the twenty-first we got Luto." Then he said, flat and peremptory, "Rabbit Stockings, you should be a scientist."

"Yes," Rabbit Stockings said.

"They tell me, Rabbit Stockings," Big Sant said, "that an Indian can tell, that is, his religion gives him some secret insight into animals."

"That's not true," Rabbit Stockings said.

"That, for example, a horse like Luto, do you suppose—? What do you suppose? I've always felt that Luto was too damn co-operative, that it had some ulterior purpose."

"Ulterior?"

"That there is something wrong with Luto, I mean."

"What do you mean?" the Indian asked.

"If Indians believe that each person has a guardian spirit like a rock, a stone, a snake, could it be a horse?"

"I guess it could."

"Would the guardian spirit take care of everything?"

"Except dig the grave," the Indian said. "And sometimes that."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, if it were quicksand," Rabbit Stockings said.

"Why have you got this obsession with quicksand, Rabbit Stockings?"

"Because it's the only way a horse could kill Santo."

"Oh?"

"Yes. Santo is too smart for horses with the usual tricks."

"And why would Luto want to kill Sant?"

"I don't know. I'm only a poor Indian. I only work here."

"Do you have a guardian spirit, Rabbit Stockings?"

"No, I don't," Rabbit Stockings said. "Or maybe I do, but it doesn't count because I don't believe in it, not all the time. It's difficult to believe in anything all the time. You see, if you don't believe in your guardian spirit he can't help you."

"Or hurt you?"

"That's right. In other words, if Santo doesn't believe in the horse it can't hurt him or help him. In other words, if

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Santo's time had come and he didn't believe the horse was anything but a horse, then the horse would have no power."

"Well, I think there is something wrong with Luto. As I said, he's too perfect for a horse. What can we do?"

"It's probably too late now," Rabbit Stockings said. "All we can do is continue up the mountain. I guess your direction is as good as mine."

"I'm sure it is, Rabbit Stockings. A horse is a horse, no matter how perfect a horse."

"My guardian spirit is a snake."

"When we get back," Big Sant said, "we'll have a drink to the snakes."

"You don't believe it? The trouble with this country is—what is it? The trouble with this country is, we are over-developed."

"That's a profound thought, Rabbit Stockings, but we will leave all the profound Indian thoughts for later. Right now—"

"Look! Right now there's a snake!"

The horses plunged back, rising to enormous height on their hind legs in blurred Appaloosa furious fright and comic dance, in high awkward prance before the dice, the hard clean rattle in the sage ahead.

"I don't see. I hear, but I don't see. Can you see the diamond-back?"

"There!" Rabbit Stockings hollered and the diamond-back rattler exploded towards the plunging and furious motions of the horses, some grenade, anti-personnel or anti-horse weapon planted in the innocent sage, lashing out with shrapnel speed and sidewind perfect accuracy to the falling mark and missing the falling-away Appaloosa, but recoiling, rearming itself in fluid automation before the rapt and cold stricken-eyed terror of the horse, as Big Sant slid off and seized himself a great, vari-coloured trunk of petrified wood and hefted it in a vast surging motion above his head to crush the snake.

"*Wait!*"

"Why?"

"He's trying to tell us something."

"Yes, that's true, Rabbit Stockings. I got the message."

"You don't understand."

"Oh, I do. I understand rattlesnakes perfectly, and they understand me. Get out of the way before the snake kills you."

Rabbit Stockings stepped deftly and quickly in a-timed

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ballet cadence as the snake exploded again and then quickly again and then again, the snake in surly, dusty diamonds, flinging itself at the mad Indian before the Indian gained a high boulder in an unfrantic, graceful leap, resting and looking down from there at the snake, his arms akimbo.

"Well done, Rabbit Stockings. Now can I kill the other half of the act?"

"Why do you, even in your overdeveloped country, why do you have to kill things?"

"Rattlesnakes."

"Still?"

"Rattlesnakes. Oh yes." From his safe distance Big Sant let down his trunk of petrified wood and sat on it. "Or is this one a friend of yours?"

"No."

"Your guardian spirit maybe, telling you to go back?"

"I don't know."

"Some Indian nonsense like that," Big Sant said. "Still, if you want to check the *arroyo* instead of the mountain we will check the *arroyo* instead of the mountain. Anything you say. Anything your snake says, any opinion a rattler holds. If you don't kill 'em, join 'em. What do you think?"

"We will check the *arroyo*," Rabbit Stockings said.

"Not that I hold with snakes," Big Sant said as they quickly mounted the trembling, subdued Appaloosas, "but in an overdeveloped country I'll always go along with a legend, a good Navajo myth. Look, your snake has called it quits."

They scattered down the mountain, their horses tumbling in mad pursuit of home, wild and uncontrolled, the riders allowing their horses to plunge downward in furious gyrations, careening and bouncing with awful abrupt speed like some kind of huge bright chunks of ore hurtling downward from a blast above on the high, still snow-coifed in June, scintillant, far peaks of the Sangre de Cristos, flashing down, down, down in twisting horse rapture to the sage avenues of the flat earth.

"The La Jara Arroyo," Rabbit Stockings hollered to Big Sant, and beginning now to direct the horse. "That's where Little Sant must be. That's where the quicksand is. The La Jara Arroyo."

"Yes," Big Sant said quietly to himself and the horse. "Yes. Yes, at my age I'm taking orders from a fool Navajo Indian and a snake, a guardian spirit Rabbit Stockings called it, but you and I," he told the still raging horse, "you and

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I saw a rattler. Wait! This way," and Big Sant went the way of Rabbit Stockings, both fleeing now between yellow plumes of yucca and among a bright festooned desert carpet of the twenty-first of June.

At the bottom of the *arroyo* nothing moved where the young man had been struggling. The water ran serene now, limpid and innocent. Where they watched from their horses atop the great canyon their searching eyes could see all the way to where the La Jara joined the Puerco but no sign, no clue of Little Sant, only the dusky, burnished copper fire sky above the *arroyo* heralding the slow end of a long day.

"The summer solstice you called it?"

"Yes, Rabbit Stockings."

"It was a long day all right."

"Rabbit Stockings, we should have continued to the mountain."

"No, I'm afraid we came in the right direction," Rabbit Stockings said. "But I don't understand. I don't understand why we weren't told sooner."

"We should have continued to the mountain," Big Sant insisted. "I don't know why I had to listen to a Navajo Indian and a rattlesnake."

Rabbit Stockings slid off down the sleek sweat of his speckled horse and stared from the ground with incredulous and uncomprehending disbelief at the vast empty cut one hundred feet deep, bottomed with a thin thread of water feeding the Rio Grande and becoming bronze now as it refracted in quick shimmers the maddening and molten sky. Rabbit Stockings crawled forward on the hard earth up to the sage-sprinkled lip of the *arroyo*, then he thumped the earth with the palm of his small rough red hand. "Yes."

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, they crossed here, Little Sant and Luto. Look, this is Luto's hoof print. See how it goes like a heart in front?"

"Yes, almost cloven. That's Luto. But where did they go?"

"Down," Rabbit Stockings said, capping his vision and staring across. "But I don't see where they went up." Rabbit Stockings continued to search all along the *arroyo* while Big Sant sat frozen. "But there's something moving down there in the tamarisk," Rabbit Stockings said finally.

"Hello!" Big Sant shouted. "Who's there?"

"It's me!"

"It sounds like Little Sant," Rabbit Stockings said. "A

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little weak but what can you expect. That you, Santo? Okay?"

"Yes," the voice of Little Sant called up. "But don't come down. Please don't come down."

But Big Sant had already started his Appaloosa in a steep dive down the awful slope. Rabbit Stockings tried to arrest him with an upraised hand but Big Sant was already hurtling halfway to the bottom, horse and rider commingled in a vortex of riotous earth spinning down to the sliver of bronzed stream that lazied to the big river, guiltless.

"Me, too," Rabbit Stockings shouted as he gained his horse and catapulted it in one great leap out and down, the horse sprawling as it hit and never quite recovering; foundering like a novice skier on busted skis it cavorted crazy to the bottom where it righted on all four scattered legs and stood amazed and triumphant.

"Don't come!" Little Sant shouted towards them both. "Don't come over here!"

"Why not?"

"Because I'm telling you why not."

"Go ahead."

There was a long silence from the tamarisks.

"Because there's a snake here, a dangerous rattler. He killed a horse. The snake killed Luto."

"Where's the snake?" Rabbit Stockings dropped off his horse and moved into the thick interlacing tamarisk. "Where's the snake, Santo?"

"He's gone. The snake was coiled there, where you're standing now. He's gone."

"What snake?" The heavy voice of Big Sant moved into the tamarisk. "What snake? Where's the horse? Where's Luto?"

"Luto's dead. Luto went down in the quicksand." Santo stood up, a small tower of mud. "I was stuck in the quicksand and Luto just stood here and watched. Then Luto was struck by this big snake. I could see the snake strike at Luto, then Luto panicked into the quicksand, got stuck, but I was able to get out using Luto to crawl up, but Luto got stuck worse and began to go under and there was nothing I could do. Luto's dead."

"No," Rabbit Stockings announced, "Luto's not dead."

"I saw Luto die."

"No, you saw Luto sink in the sand, that's all. Luto will be back."

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"Oh, you bet I'll never buy a horse that looks like that again."

"Luto won't look like that again," Rabbit Stockings said. "The next time Luto could appear as a beautiful woman, for example."

"Well, I'll never buy a beautiful woman, for example."

"Get up behind," Big Sant said down from his horse.

Little Sant squished up and clasped his muddied arms around Big Sant.

"And another thing," Rabbit Stockings advised in his advising tone, "never do anything on Shrove Tuesday."

"It's not Shrove Tuesday, it's the summer solstice," Big Sant said.

"All right, be careful of that too," Rabbit Stockings advised. "Now that we don't have any medicine bundles—"

"What?"

"So now we've got to be careful all the time," Rabbit Stockings finished.

As they passed the stream in muddy file, Little Sant pointed at the spot. "That's where it almost happened."

Rabbit Stockings said, "That's where it did happen."

"I mean to me."

"You're not the centre of the world."

"I suppose the Indians are."

"That's nice of you, Santo. I've always supposed they were too."

The horses pounded now in wild scurry up out of the fast darkening *arroyo* and they gained the long flat country gilded in light, all of them in the gaudy sunset.

"Well, I'll tell you," Little Sant said, "it was terrible, my almost . . . then Luto's death down there, but outside of that—" He stared from behind his huge father with muddied eyes at the Indian—"Outside of that I don't believe any of it."

The Indian, Rabbit Stockings, trotted forward in a wild rhythm on his dazzling pony and pointed his luminous arm up at the faltering fire going out. "Don't you believe this was the day of the white man's summer solstice?"

"Yes," Little Sant said, grabbing his hard father with stiffening arms and looking towards the darkness back at the *arroyo*. "Yes, Rabbit Stockings, today was very long, today was the most long, the longest day there ever was." Now Little Sant looked straight ahead into the end of a Midsummer Day. "Yes, we've all got to pray we never have a summer solstice again."

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VIVIAN ELLIS

A notable theatre personality on what every man should know

Clubmanship!

A Man's World A club is a place where a married woman sends her husband, when he is not otherwise usefully employed, in order to get him out of the house and from under her feet. That is why it is so often listed by famous men under the heading, Occupation.

A club is a place where a husband may go, other than the smallest room in the house, to obtain a measure of silence. That is why so many club rooms have a notice, *No Talking*. There are also women's clubs, where a married woman may continue her interrupted conversation.

A club is a place where a wife may keep tabs on her husband, if she is clever.

A club is a place where a husband may remember his mistress and forget all about his wife with the aid of the hall porter to take any messages.

A club is somewhere to sleep in at any hour of the day or night until it is time to go home. It is also a convenient spot for the perusal of out-of-date periodicals, the current ones being all in the hands of other members.

A club is somewhere where a man may talk about his exploits without fear of interruption, especially when it is his turn to pay for the drinks. It is also a place where a man may enjoy any amount of hospitality, provided that he is a good listener.

A club is a place where a man may transact business, despite rules expressly forbidding him to do so.

I have known men who have risen to the top of their business and professions, just by arriving (as well as departing)

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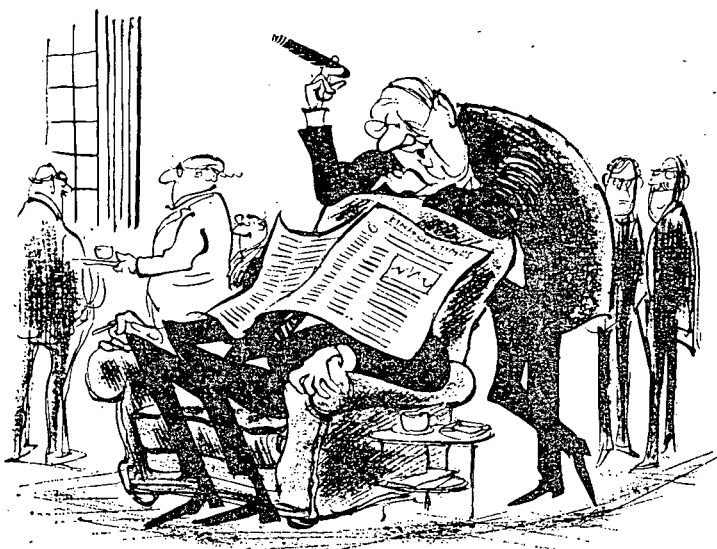
from their clubs at the right moment. I am not very good at this myself, having no business to transact just at present, but then, I am not a very good clubman.

I confess that I once resigned from a club because so many members attacked me with their plays that were not quite strong enough for production but would have made ideal musicals—although why they should have imagined this I could never understand.

A club is for the lonely and the gregarious. Each is able to



There is at least one in every club

batten on the other. It is also a place for the bridge player in search of a partner, provided he doesn't lay down the law. Personally I would not dream of telling anybody anything, but then I do not play bridge.

Club wine can be very good. Club food, with certain exceptions, can be and often is, very poor. Club tea and anchovy toast are invariably excellent.

Club servants are generally and most fortuitously incorporated into the fabric of the building when it is first opened. The menservants treat members as if they were school prefects and their visitors like fags. This suits some members, who haven't been looked up to since they left school.

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The women waitresses treat members with that easy familiarity born of long practice in dealing with refractory inmates of an orphanage.

Club ties are worn all over the world by foreigners under the impression that they are exhibiting the latest designs in neckwear from Bond Street and the Burlington Arcade.

A club is a place of retreat. That is why it is so well supported by its older members. Yet even here, life obtrudes in the form of the Club Bore. The Club Bore is recognisable from afar by his penetrating bark which, owing to loose dentures, is often worse than his bite.

There is at least one Club Bore kept in every club, just as there is a ship's cat and a regimental dog or any other form of mascot. Generally, you become aware of his approach by the light of recognition in his eye. A large daily newspaper will act as a screen (I find *The Financial Times* useful in this respect unless he is a money-bore in which case you are sunk), but should you be unlucky enough to be caught at a meal you must at once feign deafness by raising your left hand to your left ear while you continue eating your peas with your knife. The other members will understand.

At one West End Club I would see a man, failing to attract an audience, conducting long conversations with himself in front of a mirror.

These would continue, with appropriate gestures of response, far into the night.

Actually, if I don't go home soon, I shall start doing it myself.

And On The Town After a very prolonged and painstaking survey of our night spots, causing me the loss of many hours' sleep, I have reached the following conclusion—namely that night life in any city is a matter of degree.

Abroad, the temperature rises higher and sinks lower than the Englishman's—but we keep our feelings and our plumbing under proper control, excepting after a prolonged thaw. Otherwise, there is not a great deal of difference in our habits.

The Popular or Big Night Club

This is international and once inside you could be in London, Paris, New York, Berlin or Rome; anywhere, in fact, with the possible exception of some of our smaller cathedral cities.

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The head waiter will regret that he hasn't a vacant table. Tip him and he will immediately produce one. In the Lido in Paris, you can usually find a seat at the bar at the back for nothing.

The food provided, under the heading of Mass Catering, is as tasteless as possible. This avoids unnecessary delay in savouring it. A cover charge includes amenities such as two dance bands, two floor shows with girls, two flags on the table and the use of the dance floor and toilet accommodation, but excludes the price of drinks, flashlight photographs and the use of girls excepting for decoration.

These clubs are nothing if not parochial. Here it is not only possible but extremely probable that you will meet your friends from out of town, from overseas, from everywhere except your own place of residence.

Moreover the lighting will be bright enough for them to recognise you.

The Smart and Usually Small Night Club

Here you will meet some of the old familiar faces. This, despite an almost total lack of illumination. Also, the smaller the club, the greater your tip to secure a table. The food will be almost identical with the last and so will the wine, but these will be at least twice as expensive.

Instead of two bands there will be two musicians and instead of two floor shows with girls, there will be one man making rude remarks about the Tory Party or singing ruder songs. Music will be muted and the dance floor the size of a postage stamp, so save your fancier Terpsichorean flights for the larger establishments.

One rather snooty night club used to have a moustachio'd gypsy violinist who, after coming up and soulfully playing one of my songs at me while I waited in vain for myself and my table to sink through the floor, would hiss, "I make you plenty of money in performing rights; no?" NO.

The Naughty Night Club

Externally, this is similar to above, except that in order to gain entry you may have to tip the doorman as well as the head waiter.

Inside, it is so dark that you have to recognise your drink by the taste and not always then. For here, instead of food for the body, there is food for the tired business mind. I refer to the Strip-Tease. Believe it or not, this is not a new

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Here you will meet old familiar faces

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thing but a very ancient cult handed down from a lady called Bath-Sheba to a number of contemporary young women who often during its performance, at least in private, complain of a headache and "I don't feel like going on." In public, however, they not only go on but go off; which brings us to the real home of this stimulating form of art.

The Non-Stop Strip-Tease Club

(Members only and don't forget to sign the book.)

This is a relatively new innovation, replacing the smaller clubs that once provided this brand of entertainment which is what the majority of their customers come to see. Instead of the formality of tables and chairs plus a staff to wait, the chorus gets straight down to business in a basement room furnished with a few rows of seats and an improvised stage.

First, the visitor is regaled by the strains of a gramophone playing a wornout EP record with a wornout needle. Next comes the appearance of a wornout young woman on the stage who, having carefully and most sensibly adjusted an electric radiator, proceeds to disrobe with the minimum of haste.

Whilst disrobing, she absentmindedly waves each garment at her grinning or open-mouthed but exclusively male audience, who respond with guffaws or appreciative whistles according to the lady's vital statistics.

At the conclusion of her performance, which is when she has nothing left to wave, the curtains are discreetly drawn and another scratchy record is played.

A voice announces the following item with suitable encomiums of praise and the whole business is repeated by a somewhat livelier girl giving a somewhat livelier performance and a good time is had by all except the man at the door who has seen it several times before.

The Clip Joint

I have always wanted to see a clip joint.

In the interest of this work I went with a friend and I must confess we were disappointed. Nobody brought us black currant juice and then overcharged us—much. We weren't offered a cigarette, let alone Indian hemp. Nobody was stabbed nor obligingly bled to death.

There wasn't a single gang fight and the police were neither summoned nor arrived.

Actually, nobody arrived, barring me and my companion.

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After paying our entrance fee and signing a book, we were ushered down some creaking stairs into a tatty basement room which was virtually (and that night virtue was triumphant) empty.

Perhaps it was the weather. It was very cold. Perhaps it was the early hour. It was scarcely one o'clock in the morning.

Whatever the cause, the effect was extremely depressing.

The proprietor, of course, made the usual excuses. "De goils have just gone out for a sandwitch." I would have thought they could have had one on the premises.

"Dey'll be back soon." Not if they had any nous.

"Do you require Company?" He made it sound like coffee.

Company sat huddled over a spluttering gas fire, apparently deeply engrossed in her paperback—not, unfortunately, one of mine. She neither attempted to greet us nor approach us until the drinks (already paid for) arrived and even then, did so with every show of reluctance. This wasn't at all what I had been brought up to expect. "Why didn't you come over and talk to us before?" I asked her. "Surely I can't look as old and unappetising as all that?"

Company giggled. "You don't 'arf make me larf, you do," she replied. "But whenever I see two men together I'm kind of wary. One's all right, see, but two of you might be up to anythink."

"And suppose we weren't up to anythink?"

"You might be talking business. Some gentlemen like to talk business."

"What, here?" I asked incredulously. "At this time of night? And where," I said to the proprietor who was hovering none too discreetly, "is the business?"

"De business? You know the way it is." I didn't know. "It comes and goes."

"In your case it seems to have disappeared altogether. Could it be," I added, trying to be helpful, "that the businessman has taken to heart Lord Snow's admirable advice to cut down on those lunches and go home earlier in order to devote himself to his thoughts?"

"Dat," answered the proprietor with a touch of acerbity, "ain't our kind of business."

"In which case, we'd better be going ourselves."

Before we had reached the door, Company was back at her book and toasting her feet over the gas fire.

It made a cosy little domestic scene.

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FANCY

MY FIRST recollection of Aunt Cissie was of a woman shrouded in a large bib apron that covered her blouse and skirt and came down low over her knees. Three steel curlers tortured the front of her blonde hair while the rest was hidden away under a cotton handkerchief tied in the front in a mammy-bow.

I did not think her pretty or plain or anything in particular. She was just my Aunt Cissie and I was to live with her for an unspecified time in the northern town until my parents had settled in a new home.

The details are a little blurred in my mind. I was ten years old and all I knew was that my father was between jobs and had gone south to try his luck in London.

He had been on the halls and my mother and I had followed him from town to town, living in lodgings, and it seemed to me that I spent my life on tiptoe so as not to disturb the usually disgruntled and fault-finding landladies.

Aunt Cissie had a husband and four sons and the house was shared by my grandparents, though they only occupied one room on the ground floor, where they ate, cooked and slept.

The house was old but large enough and I was given the first landing bedroom. It was small and without a window and I didn't care for it over much—but then I wasn't a fussy child and one bed was the same as another to me, for I had slept in so many, most of them lumpy and cold.

Aunt Cissie was receiving a few shillings a week for my keep so she didn't begrudge another person in her already cluttered house.

The four boys accepted me with embarrassed indifference and the eldest, Ronnie, beetroot-faced, informed me that I must never walk down the street beside him or even acknowledge him should we meet by accident outside. He was fourteen and girls in his opinion were the lower species and must be

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MAN

He burdened the room and though he only took up one chair, his personality spread to every corner

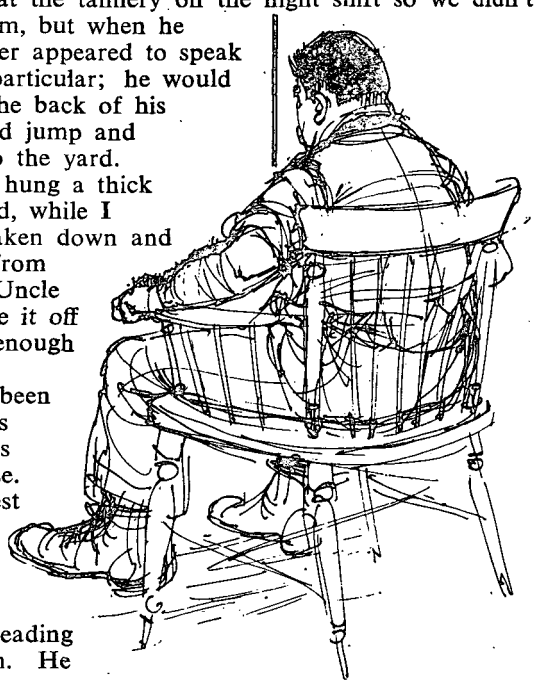
by LEONE STEWART

ignored, if he were to retain the respect of his school fellows.

Aunt Cissie's husband, my Uncle Bill, was a big man with dark, close-cropped hair and black hairy arms that a spider could have crawled up unnoticed.

He would burden a room with his presence and though he only took up one chair in the kitchen, it seemed to me that his giant personality spread to every corner.

He worked at the tannery on the night shift so we didn't see a lot of him, but when he was in, he never appeared to speak to anyone in particular; he would just growl in the back of his throat and we'd jump and scatter out into the yard.



On the wall hung a thick leather belt and, while I never saw it taken down and used, I heard from the boys that Uncle Bill would have it off the hook fast enough if need be.

After I had been at Aunt Cissie's about four days I had a surprise.

Nick, youngest of the quartet, was lying on the rag mat in front of the range; I was reading a comic to him. He

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accepted me without rancour because I could tell him what the words were, for at seven he was still unable to read.

Uncle Bill had taken himself off to work an hour earlier, clattering through the front door and up the cobbled street in his heavy boots and with his head in a cloth cap, bent against the wind. He left in his wake the whisper of a sigh in the house.

Even Grandma had poked her head round the door and said to Cissie: "Has he gone then?" She knew he had, but she liked to ask, to feel the relief of it all.

Cissie had smiled and then hurried away up the stairs, pulling the steel curlers from the front of her hair.

Grandma was frightened of men, all men, even my father, who was without a temper and mild as watered beer, according to my mother.

But Grandma's fear was built in. Uncle Bill was her own son, yet she feared him as she did the old white-haired man in the velvet jacket who sat by the window in their room all day, smoking a pipe and unable to move very far because of his bad legs. Soon, I knew, she would go in awe of her own grandsons when their voices broke.

When the kitchen door pushed open I looked up from the comic I was reading to Nick, and saw a stranger standing there.

People did walk in off the street uninvited, but that was neighbours and they always came through the back door and never in anything but apron and slippers.

This woman had a coat on—a blue soft coat with a narrow edging of fur around the collar—and above it her face was carefully made up with pink lipstick and powder, while a great fluff of blonde hair came out in the front from a Juliet cap.

"What's the matter?" she said. "Didn't you know me first off, hinny?"

It was Aunt Cissie's voice but not Aunt Cissie, surely? Not this lady who reminded me of those girls I had seen on the stage at the theatres where my father had worked.

I looked down at her silk-stockinged legs, her high-heeled shoes all cut out round the toes, and then up again at the long gloves she was smoothing on and the crocodile handbag that was over her arm. I had never really seen anyone as smart before, off the stage.

"It's our ma," Nick said, giving me a nudge, "so stop your gawping, will you."

"Off to bed, you," she said to him, "and tell the others to

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come in off the street and I want no gas on upstairs and no lighting of matches and burning the place down."

She gave me a smile, since I wasn't one of hers but a guest.

"There's bread and dripping in the larder, hinny, if you want it, and tell our Ronnie to make you a cup of cocoa. You can have the condensed milk if you've a fancy for it, but the others can't. There's bare enough for the morning tea."

When she had gone, high stepping in her heels and leaving the drift of scent behind her, I looked again at young Nick. He was back at the comic and pointing to a word and asking me what it was.

"I'll tell you later," I said, blackmailing him. "Now where's your mother gone off to, then?"

"Out," he answered.

"I know 'out,' but out where?"

"To the pictures, maybe. What does it matter?"

It mattered to me. Curiosity had always been one of my failings; some people had another word for it and thought I liked to know too much. The point was I knew I'd never sleep that night unless I had discovered where Aunt Cissie had gone. Nick wouldn't tell me, so I went in search of Grandma.

She was doing down the stairs, though it was nine o'clock at night, and when I came up beside her I got a blow of dust in my face.

"Away with you," she said, "and wash yourself for bed."

"Where's my Aunt Cissie gone, then?" I inquired, swinging my long hair and hampering her efforts with the brush and pan.

"To see a man about a dog."

I had heard that one before so I knew it meant mind your own business.

In bed that night I went back to thinking about Aunt Cissie and how pretty she had looked and I got to wondering if Uncle Bill ever saw her that way, though I couldn't see how. He was on the night shift and by the next morning she'd have those curlers in again and that apron that made her look like every other tired woman in the street.

You can't live in a house and not know its secrets, and it wasn't long before I heard that Uncle Bill had been in prison.

Now the big man with the spider black arms commanded a new respect in my eyes. Anyone who had been in prison and lived to come out must be wonderful, I decided, and when I looked at him, sitting at the kitchen table with a mug of strong tea in front of him and reading the racing paper

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propped against a treacle tin, I would try to imagine how he had looked in a small dark cell with bars at the window and a ball and chain around his ankle.

I never thought of him as a criminal, only a hero who had managed to survive such an ordeal, and it put him on a plane, in my estimation, with the saints and martyrs.

A few weeks later Agnes Hoar, who lived at the end of our street and had a reddish nose and hair too short for her round moon face, told me about Aunt Cissie.

"You mean you don't know where she goes to of a night-time?" she smirked, more ugly than usual.

"To the pictures," I answered.

Agnes had been bouncing a ball and proving how she could throw it up against the wall from under her leg and still catch it. Now she stopped her silly game and saliva dribbled from her thick lips; her mouth was watering with pleasure at what she had to tell me.

"Your Aunt Cissie has got a fancy man! That's who she goes to meet, all dressed in her finery. I bet he pays for her smart clothes, she'd never have them otherwise, not on the wages your Uncle Bill earns at the tannery." She paused and gave me a sly, undercover look. "Everyone knows about it, everyone except your Uncle Bill. He's off the scene, isn't he, at night? She never goes out until he's away to work. If he found her out he'd tan her black and blue and she'd never be able to open her eyes for a week of Sundays."

I wanted to pull her hair but I knew she'd only pull mine back and that was long so it would hurt me more. Instead I kicked her on the ankle and then I ran home.

A fancy man, whatever that was, didn't sound nice to me, and I wondered why Aunt Cissie wanted anyone else when she had our Uncle Bill.

It worried my mind like the spot on the back of my neck and I had constant visions of Uncle Bill finding out and then taking that belt down from the hook on the wall and Aunt Cissie being black and blue all over and her eyes closed for a week of Sundays, as Agnes Hoar had said.

I tried to believe it was all lies, yet I did know that curtains twitched at windows when Aunt Cissie walked down the street in her high heels, and my grandmother always got out the brooms and buckets, as if she had to be busy to stop herself thinking about where her daughter-in-law had gone . . .

It was a warm summer's evening and I was standing at the corner of the street, eating chips from a newspaper, when I

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saw Aunt Cissie leave the house. She had on her blue coat and now there was a yellow feathered hat on her head and she walked with a happy swing that she never did in apron and slippers.

She went past me, smelling of her scent, and she smiled prettily at me.

I didn't return to the house but screwed up the greasy newspaper and followed Aunt Cissie.

Down the hill she went and I kept a fair distance behind her, though had she turned her head she would have seen me.

I was nervous, for there were alleyways *en route* where rough boys lurked and they'd chase me with sticks and stones if they saw me; and I could hardly have run to my aunt for protection, for I was a spy in a cotton dress and plimsolls.

When she reached the High Street I thought she would take a tram and that meant I could trail her no farther, for I had spent my last penny on the chips.

But she kept on walking. Past the closed shops and the lighted cafés, the grand new cinema, the amusement arcade, with me only a dozen yards behind.

All about us was the smell of horses and traffic and the end-of-day dust. Dirty water gushed across the pavement from a burst pipe and garbage spilled out of a grey bin by a closed greengrocery store.

It was after nine and beginning to get dark and the breath was choking in my throat in case a policeman came up and asked me what I was doing. If I admitted to being a spy he would arrest me on the spot, I felt sure.

Aunt Cissie stopped outside a red brick public house called The Sawyer's Arms, and then she pushed open a door and went in.

There were plenty of other public houses nearer home that she could have entered, if it was only a wet beer she wanted, but this was a smart new place and I had heard they held wedding receptions there and dances on a Saturday night. But this wasn't

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a Saturday so my aunt could not have been going to a dance.

When I reached the door she had gone through I saw the words SALOON BAR written on the frosted glass and I hung about outside, pretending I was waiting for someone.

When I got up the courage I needed, I pressed my nose against the door. It was just possible to see inside because where the words SALOON BAR were written the glass was unfrosted.

There was a lot of rising blue smoke and a curving bar with men leaning on it, and then at a small table I saw Aunt Cissie. She had a wine glass in front of her, with something red in it, and she wasn't alone.

He was a little man. I knew he was little because he was lower in his seat than my aunt. He had a head nearly bald and a droopy moustache, and he wore steel-rimmed spectacles.

He was laughing and he had an arm around Aunt Cissie's shoulder as if it were a party, only I knew it wasn't. They weren't speaking to anyone else, just to each other.

Then she nuzzled up close to him and with a terrible shock I saw her kiss him. This, I knew then, without a shadow of doubt, was her fancy man!

I fled. I didn't stop running until I was back at the house and charging through the yard and into the kitchen.

Then with the same horror I experienced when my elastic broke, I saw Uncle Bill sitting at the table!

He was in his shirtsleeves, his braces hanging down and his boots off, and he was reading the evening paper. He had a leather fingerstall on his left thumb and between his lips the last dying embers of a cigarette.

The boys were nowhere to be seen; only the cat sat before the range washing herself, with the tail of a mouse beside her.

"Where you been till this late hour, hinny?" Uncle Bill asked, spitting out the cigarette butt. "Don't you know the time, then? Your grandma has been that worried."

Not worried for me, I felt sure, but worried for Aunt Cissie. Out with her fancy man and now Uncle Bill had come home unexpected. I reasoned it must be because he had hurt his thumb at the tannery, though how I could trouble to work that out then, I don't know. My heart was thumping so loud I thought he'd hear it and my face was scarlet with guilt from what I had seen—Aunt Cissie happily kissing her fancy man in The Sawyer's Arms!

I looked at the jar of pickles on the table because I had to have something to focus on while I edged my way round the

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table to the door that would let me escape by way of the stairs.

"What's the matter, then?" Uncle Bill spoke gently, not with a growl and a grunt the way he did to the boys. "Did someone frighten you out there on the street?"

"Oh, no, no," I said.

And then I couldn't help it. I tore my gaze away from the swimming pickles to stare at the leather belt on the wall hook. When Aunt Cissie came home in her finery and her high heels, smelling of scent and wine, with her hair all frizzy under the feathered hat, he would be waiting.

In my imagination I could hear her screams and Grandma getting out the brooms and pails to take her mind off, and the boys hiding under their beds and me running for a policeman. Black and blue all over and her eyes closed for a week of Sundays. That was the fate that awaited my poor, feckless aunt.

I crawled into the cold sheets and lay there biting my nails and knowing I dared not go to sleep. I was still fully dressed, even to my socks and plimsolls.

I had to be ready to run for that policeman and I wondered where I should find one. There were plenty about in the daytime, chasing the kids or hiding round the corner of the alley where they knew the bookmaker's runner would be coming. But late at night, after the pubs and the fish-and-chip shops had closed, where would they be then?

In Grandma's room the clock chimed every hour and I could hear it, and it was like an eternity between one hour and the next.

I told myself stories to stay awake, I recited all the poetry I knew. I went over and over my tables, even the nine times which I hated.

But still the hours dragged on leaden feet and twelve chimes were the last I heard before the shadow of sleep descended.

When I woke up it was to find Aunt Cissie shaking me. I sat bolt upright, stiff as a poker.

"Shall I run for the policeman?" I gasped.

"Policeman? Are you still dreaming, hinny? The boys are to school and the streets have been washed and it's near on ten and you still with your head under the bedclothes."

I looked slowly up into her face; a face free of make-up now, the curlers in the front of her hair, the apron over her blouse and skirt, and no hint of scent, just carbolic soap.

I kept the sheets up high to my neck. I didn't want her to

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see I was still fully dressed. I hadn't wanted to waste a second before running for the policeman, but now she mustn't see for she'd ask questions for sure and how could I explain?

"Now up with you and if you're down in one minute you shall have the porridge scrapings from the saucepan."

The leather belt was still on the hook and the kitchen tidy, with no hint of a battle having taken place here last night. Yet I couldn't be certain Aunt Cissie wasn't black and blue all over under her apron, and I had been so tired I might have slept through her screams.

She was spooning condensed milk into my tea and I wondered if she had noticed my crushed dress.

"I've got news for you," she said. "I had a letter this morning. Your dad's got a job in London and your ma's coming to fetch you the day after tomorrow. They've found a place to live and now you'll be going to school regular. I never did hold with all that wandering around the country, no life for you and your ma, it wasn't."

"Uncle Bill was home last night," I said, for though I was pleased at the thought of my mother coming for me, I was still anxious for Aunt Cissie.

"Yes, that's right." She carried the brown teapot over to the range and popped the cosy over it. Another couple of sessions it would have to do before she'd empty out the soaked leaves.

"Did he hurt his thumb?" I asked, trying to swallow the gooey porridge.

"I think so. But he'd taken himself off to bed before I got in. He likes his sleep, that one, always did. He'll go to work tonight, I'll see to that. We can't do without the wages."

So he had been in bed and asleep. He hadn't seen her come in, all dressed up and smelling of scent.

It was a great relief. Perhaps Uncle Bill had just thought she had gone to the pictures with a woman neighbour and not concerned himself.

My mother came for me, and Aunt Cissie, in her old tweed coat and her curlers, was there with all the boys and Grandma to see us off at the coach station when we left.

My stay in the north was over and I found whenever I thought about the family it was only Uncle Bill's face that I could clearly remember. His blue eyes with the bags of loose flesh underneath and the shaggy black brows above. I had gone in awe of him like everyone else in that house, and yet I felt so sorry I had never troubled to ask after his thumb.

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I never saw my aunt or uncle again. The grandparents died eventually and, a few years after the war, Uncle Bill went, too.

It was thirty years later when I met Nick, the youngest boy, again.

I was married with my own family by then and living in Devon on my husband's farm. Then one day Nick, who was in the Navy, walked in unexpectedly. He was a second Uncle Bill to look at, dark with hairy arms and eyes as blue as the sea.

After hours of talking over old times, I asked after his mother.

"She's fine," he said, "but near on seventy now, of course. Yet no-one would believe it to look at her. She still lives in the same house and she's put on a bit of weight and she can't wear her high heels any more. Otherwise—" and he chuckled deep in his throat—"she's the same bright spark and goes off on her own in the evenings to meet him."

"Him?" I questioned.

"The boyfriend. The same one, you know, even if he is some years older than her. They could have got married after Dad died, but she didn't want that. I reckon it would have taken the bite out of it, the dare. When you cook a man's breakfast and clean his boots and wash his back in the bath, there isn't a lot of romance left. This way he's still her fancy man, the one she slips out on the quiet to meet."

I thought of that balding head and the droopy moustache and it was difficult to associate such a man with romance or to visualise what he must look like now, thirty years later.

Or did Aunt Cissie only see him through the eyes of memory and he recall the young woman in the feathered hat who met him clandestinely in The Sawyer's Arms while her husband was on the night shift?

"What about your father?" I asked Nick. "Everyone else seemed to know, even the children, and certainly all the neighbours who watched her progress down the street with such avid interest."

"Oh, the neighbours—" Nick laughed again. "It gave them something to gossip about amongst themselves and they stoned her in their minds every time she passed in her pretty clothes. But no-one dared tell Dad. You see, they knew he had been in prison. Six months he served for nearly killing a man.

"There was a fight at the end of our street. It happened

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quite a while before you came to stay with us. The man was drunk and he didn't like my father, so he opened his mouth a bit too wide about my mother.

"Dad broke his nose and then picked him up and threw him against a brick wall as if he'd been a rat. If the police hadn't come on the scene when they did, I reckon Dad would have finished him off." Nick leaned back in his chair and then he added: "The funny part was, our dad was such a gentle man. Oh, there was the belt on the wall to scare the pants off us when we were kids, but he never used it. He would just look at it when we gave any trouble or answered him back.

"He only had that one fight in the whole of his life and no-one dared talk about my mother again in his hearing.

"He loved her, you see, and he couldn't give her much—four boys and a shared house and a pinch all the time where money was concerned. He worked on the night shift to give her extra and the chance to get out on her own."

"You mean he knew all the time?" I said with incredulity, remembering that big man who could put the fear of dragons into me with a glance.

Nick shrugged his broad shoulders and then he smiled. "A man only knows as much as he wants to know. Let's just say that my father was . . . content."

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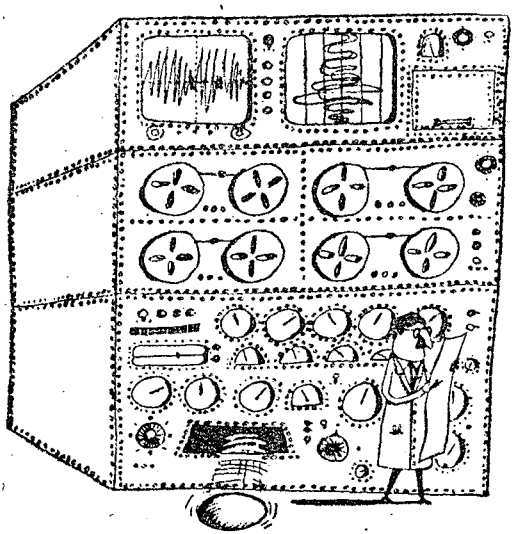

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Can a house really have a ghost —
or does fiction get confused with fact?

The Cornish Farm

WINSTON GRAHAM

WE WERE looking for a farm.

It seems to me that a great many people have this ambition at some time in their lives, especially in years of tribulation. Their yeoman ancestry comes out; they want to own a few acres and see things grow. Many no doubt give up after a while. But I was lucky enough to find one.

It was Philippa who suggested we should try the West Country. She'd a fancy for the milder side of England and had a few relatives scattered about who might help. I began in Wiltshire and worked my way zigzag in a series of knight's moves farther and farther west, gathering disillusionment all the time.

When I reached Cornwall I was nearly giving up, because there was no farther to go unless one jumped into the sea. And then a word over a glass of beer in a local pub sent me across country to the south coast looking for a farm called Pencarrion.

I found it, empty and for sale.

This wasn't the sort of place I'd been looking for either. The farmhouse was really an old Elizabethan house come down in the world. In parts, "come down" were the operative words. One room had a sycamore growing out of the roof. And there was no market town near. But it had forty acres of pasture and nine of woodland, some fruit trees in the ruins of a walled garden and a short drive bordered with blue hydrangeas. In the skirts of the woodland was the chimney of an old tin mine. The place had been empty about a year, but a neighbouring farmer had used the land so it came

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near to being in the "good heart" that one read so much about in the advertisements.

The price was not unreasonable for these days—I mean not more than would have bought a country estate and a mansion before the war. But it was a third less than most of the other ruins I had been inspecting, so I sent a soberly worded telegram to Philippa. When she came it took her exactly seven minutes to make up her mind, which was three minutes less than I had reckoned on. Only once, just before the contracts were exchanged, she said to the local solicitor who was acting for both parties, "I hope there's no snag that we don't know about—a plague of rats, for instance, or too much arsenic in the subsoil."

It's quite unusual these days to see false teeth as regular as piano keys—they're going out at last—but he gave us a good view of his.

"Nothing to our knowledge, madam. It was the big house of the district at one time, and the old men seldom made mistakes in choosing where they built their homes."

Well, we moved in. There *was* nothing wrong, except what neglect and weather had done. It was probably the collapsed north end of the house that had scared away buyers, but in fact we solved that pretty quickly. Two bricklayers in a matter of weeks sealed off the end, and we were left with half a house that was quite reasonably weatherproof and cosy. We took on two local men, one called Bray and one called Aukett, and we got down to the hard business of making a living.

At first the district was strange. There are parts of Cornwall that are still foreign to the Anglo-Saxon. It took time to get used to the antiquity of the house itself. I used to look round sometimes and speculate that the masons who had laid these stones had perhaps been doing so while Anne Boleyn was an up-and-coming young deb at the court of Henry. Men living then might have remembered Bosworth Field. It was difficult to realise. I would have liked to find out more about the Pencarrions who had first settled here and who for three centuries had been masters of the district, but Philippa said no.

"Let's take it as it stands," she said. "It has no memories for us. Why should we try to create them?"

Sound enough advice probably. But, as it happened, it was she who made the first real discovery about the people who had lived here.

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No-one had touched the apple trees in the semi-walled garden for about five years, and before the leaves had fallen I was at them with saw and pruning knife and creosote, not because I believed this occupation would ease our financial stress but for pure love of aesthetic form. Nothing looks worse than an apple tree gone to overgrowth; nothing better than one pruned back to its fruiting spurs.

It was when I was at this scarecrow occupation, balanced in a ridiculous posture fifteen feet in the air while sawdust blew in my eyes and the branches whipped and jabbed, that I saw right across the farmyard to where Philippa was in earnest conversation with Aukett. The conversation roused my curiosity because it went on for so long.

Over supper that night I asked her about it, She seemed to want to put me off; and then, when I wouldn't be, she said, "What was the name of the last owner here?"

"Tredinnick."

"And before that?"

"Boduel, I think."

"That's it. Boduel. Aukett was telling me about Boduel. He went raving mad."

I said, "He must have banged his head once too often on that lavatory door."

"No, seriously. This was about seven years ago. They'd only been living here for two years at the time. Boduel was a Cornishman, Aukett says, who'd made a lot of money during the war and decided to retire here. He came down with his wife from London, and they brought a couple of servants with them." Philippa looked round the room. "It was Boduel who renovated the place."

"He did *what*?"

"Well, apparently he did quite a lot. It was even more of a ruin when he bought it. You were saying to me yesterday that *somebody* had spent money on it before us."

"Yes, I know . . . It's certainly been patched up."

"Apparently Boduel came down here and bought this house mainly to please his wife—and then, about eighteen months after they got settled in, she left him. She just took a suitcase and some personal jewellery with her. Aukett says the villagers were pretty sure she'd run away with another man—a poet who'd been living round here—but Boduel wouldn't give anything away. He took it very hard and put it out that she was expected back at any time. But she never came; and after a bit he began to speculate on the Stock Exchange and

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lost his money. So one night he tried to hang himself. He tried to hang himself in our bedroom, Aukett says."

"A bit of local colour. These old chaps are great on the personal touch."

"Anyway, he was cut down in time. But afterwards he was examined by doctors and certified insane. After he was taken away the Tredinnicks got the place for a song; but they were all great drinkers and let the house go completely to pot."

That ended the conversation, and we began to look through a tractor catalogue. But when we went up to bed that night she said, "I wonder which beam he used."

Philippa isn't in the least a neurotic girl, and the Boduel story dropped between us like a stone and left no apparent trace. Anyway, there was too much to do. When you take over a place that's been neglected, the pressure builds up to do everything at once. The land had to take precedence because, while you can board up a window or knock in a few extra slates at any time, nature's like a damned obstinate old man who won't be hurried. If you miss one season you've got to wait twelve months until the chance comes round again. I sighed for thirty men and three bulldozers.

So we were too busy to think about anything else. All the same, I'm glad she was away in December when the rest happened.

Aukett and Bray and the woman who did for us lived in the hamlet of Pencarrion at the foot of the hill, so while Philippa was visiting her mother I slept in the house alone, and rather liked it. I always like being in a house alone. I think one somehow gets to know it better; and I wasn't troubled by a fear of meeting ten generations of dead Pencarrions on the stairs, or even of waking one morning and hearing the creak of a rope.

But I did wake and hear something one morning, nevertheless.

It was the fifth night that I had been alone. For the two previous days, a gale had been striding across the land, birch-brooming the hills and the valleys with angry rain. For two days, chimneys had boomed, windows had rattled, everything that could bang had banged, everything that could leak had leaked, cobbles oozed liquid mud, mats wriggled like snakes, and there had been no peace in the world.

Usually I wake about six-thirty, and when I woke this morning I knew we had been left behind at last by the storm.

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It was very quiet. A quiet such as one only gets in the country, and in the winter when the birds are still. Although the room was dark, you could see the pale oblongs of the windows with their pear-shaped architraves. If allowed, Pencarrion was very free from creaks and other noises. The early Tudors knew how to build.

And just as I was thinking that, I heard a very distinct creak in one corner of the room. It was in the alcove beyond the windows and therefore in the greatest darkness. In this alcove was an easy chair and a table with some books.

The creaking stopped, but I lay there listening for some time, not quite so sure of myself as usual. It's surprising how quickly confidence ebbs away when the untoward seems about to happen.

Dawn was breaking and the light began to grow. It was infinitely silent. My breathing grew longer again. There would be a lot of work to do today, making up two days of lost time. Philippa was returning tomorrow and would be bringing—

Just for final reassurance I pulled the bedclothes quietly down so that I could stare into the corner. It was still shadowy there, but now something was coming into view.

The first thing I was certain of was a hand with a gold signet ring. Then the light seemed to catch on a shoe. Farther back and higher up you could just see a faint oval blur.

When I had swallowed back about a pound of gut, I sat up in bed with a jerk. "*Who's there?*"

No reply. In the distance now a faint wind moved like an echo of yesterday.

"Who's there? What the hell d'you mean, coming into my room?"

A man's voice said, "I might ask you the same question."

In spite of what my eyes could see, the fact that somebody actually answered shocked me still further.

I was sitting stark upright in bed now. I couldn't move any farther. My muscles were in a sort of cramp.

"But then," the voice said, "I suppose you're the present owner."

It was going to be a bright morning, and light was coming quickly. The man sat with his legs crossed. In his right hand he was holding something below the level of the table.

"What d'you want?" I croaked, and stopped. My throat was constricted as if someone were holding it.

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He said, "As a matter of fact I'd forgotten all about anyone else being here. But we won't dispute the ownership. My name's Frank Boduel. Does that mean anything to you? Ah, I see it does."

He was about fifty-five, bald, with intent watchful eyes and he hadn't shaved for some days. His clothes were curiously old-fashioned, without conforming to a period. His loose tie was not unlike a stock. His buckle shoes were either a hundred years old or in the height of fashion.

He said, "I bought this house once but never really had a chance of enjoying it. Last night when—when I was able to free myself, I came back. Can you blame me?"

The shock wave was at last receding and leaving the hard pebbles of anger behind. I made a move to get out of bed, and for the first time he stirred. He lifted his right hand. In it was a butcher's knife.

"Since I've been certified insane by all sorts of doctors I must claim the advantages of the complaint. Lie down."

I lay down. I needed the rest. It wasn't a nice position. No-one would be coming to the house yet.

He said, "You seem to have made a thorough mess of the garden. What *did* you do with the ash tree?"

After he had repeated the question, I realised he required an answer. "I cut it down."

"I *planted* that. Good God, you vandals from up country don't realise how hard it is to grow trees in this country with the winds that blow. And that depressed-looking little hedge. Whatever is it?"

"Which hedge?"

"The one by the gate."

"Pittosporum."

He grunted. "You'll not rear it. All this salt in the air."

There was silence.

"I won't try to persuade you I'm not insane," he said, and gave a brief dry laugh. "The word means nothing anyway. One is persecuted for taking an unpopular view, that's all. So were the saints."

I said, "Why were you persecuted?" If he would go on talking long enough, Aukett would come.

"Ah, you must know all the ordinary details. I'm sure I'm still talked of in the district."

"I've been here only a few months. I don't go to the village."

"Are you married?"

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"Yes. But my wife's away."

He smiled slightly and put down the knife. "Are you sure she'll return?"

I tried to think of a way of continuing. "Yours did not?"

"Ah, so I see you have heard."

"The barest details."

He was looking up at the beams of the ceiling with an intent stare.

"It's an intensely unpleasant death, being strangled by a rope," he said. "I suffered it and then they brought me round. It wasn't fair. She was the last of the Pencarrions. I suppose you know that. She persuaded me to buy this place. It had been out of her family for a century and she wanted it back. Sometimes I have thought she wanted the house more than she wanted me. When we got here she tried hard to persuade me to change my name to Pencarrion. I wouldn't. She was a beautiful woman. Dark hair, milk skin, features like a doe. I was fascinated by her. The last of the Pencarrions. My father was a postman."

I dragged up the eiderdown and pulled it round my shoulders. He watched my movements carefully.

"But I wouldn't change my name. What utter damned nonsense all this pride of name is, this glorifying of ancestry! The Fitz-something-this and the De-something-that go back only as far as the humblest labourer goes. We come out of the stewpot together, and when we're done we go back in. Arminel wouldn't see that. She took pride in the most ridiculous things. Shades of her ancestors! They'd been a lawless lot; but by the time it came to my wife the Pencarrion blood was running thin."

Boduel got up restlessly with the knife in his hand and walked to the window. "You've been pruning the apple trees, I see."

"Yes."

"I could never get the things to fruit. Good blossom, and then the wind would come."

He felt the edge of the knife with his thumb. "Are you quite alone here?"

"What happened?" I asked.

"What happened where?"

"Between you and your wife."

"Oh... We quarrelled from the start. She'd a sort of weak stubbornness, a thin pale obstinacy more durable than any anger. I'm not a vicious man. I'm not a brutal man.

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I was an ordinary human being asking for human companionship and affection. But the only interest she showed in anything or anyone was an intellectual one. No; a sham intellectual one, for intellect isn't separate from life, is it? She'd a mind with blinkers on, fastidious, selective, afraid of the mud."

He went slowly back and sat down again. "Of course, perhaps I wasn't entirely without blame. Have you ever heard of the Gorsedd?"

"How did you get in?" I asked. "All the doors were locked, weren't they?"

He considered me. "The Gorsedd is a Cornish thing in which they elect Bards and parade about in white robes like Druids. Utter damned nonsense. I'm as Cornish as can be, but this dressing up, this trying to revive something that never was, it makes me sick. Arminel got involved in it. Last descendant of one of the oldest families. It suited her perfectly—all the make-believe. She lived on make-believe. And after a while she took up with a Cornish poet called Trelowarren. He wrote poetry in the Cornish language. Can you match that! As if there aren't enough languages in the world without trying to revive one that never was any good anyhow and had no real literature of its own. Could anything be more futile? I used to laugh at her, deride her. I used to say, could anything be more futile, Arminel? She didn't like that at all."

It was almost full light now. His clothes were in a bad way and there was thick mud on his shoes. He looked as if he had been out in yesterday's gale.

"D'you get on with your wife?" he demanded of me suddenly.

"Yes."

"No doubt you make allowances sometimes. I tried hard to. I tried to believe we could go on as we were. I knew other men envied me. But it wasn't any good. In the end things went too far. This poet, this Trelowarren fellow, left the district. He made his living out of insurance or something, and his firm sent him to South Africa. Of course they'd been very friendly for some months before he left. By chance I found one of his letters. It was full of sympathy for her, with ridiculous quotations from his own poems, a sort of metaphysical love-making; and *pressing* her to leave me and join him. Then I intercepted one of her letters to him and found it a distortion of my every act, representing herself as

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martyred purity, talking about the sacredness of Celtic culture and—*promising*, making a pledge to leave me and join him as soon as it could be conveniently arranged, while I was away. Have I struck you as mentally deranged up to now?"

"No."

"No, indeed. But maybe this shows that I am, after all—because I didn't let her go."

"You—didn't let her go?"

"No, I didn't let her go. Instead, I stormed up to our bedroom—this bedroom—with her letter in my hand. And there she was—standing in front of the mirror in her white Gorsedd robes, admiring herself! Over there it was. The long mirror was against that wall. I—I waved the letter at her and told her what I thought of her; and for once she lost her temper too, and called me all the names her high mind could remember. She said she supposed I was used to opening letters since my father was a postman and no doubt had done it before me. A great bitterness welled up in me. I took her by the neck and shook her. It was not unpleasant. I often think that damned Gorsedd robe was partly to blame."

Boduel paused and sighed through his large yellow teeth.

"Are you cold?" he asked.

"No," I said carefully.

"I was cold," he said, "when I'd done it. Just for a little while I was cold. D'you remember that Browning poem of the man who strangles his mistress and then sits all night holding her head against his? What utter damned nonsense. You can't love a corpse. You can't even hate it. There's only one thing you want to do and that's get rid of it. It was midnight when I'd finished, and the servants slept out. You know the old tin mine in the orchard?"

"Yes." My mind was racing ahead of his story.

"It goes down thirteen hundred feet and links with all the disused workings in the vicinity. It's been flooded for sixty years. I carried her downstairs and through the orchard, dressed just as she was in her Druid's gown. There was no moon. Many times I've dropped things down that shaft. And some of them have made more noise than she did. Then I went back to the house, packed her suitcase and threw it after her. That was a gesture that pleased me somehow. Then I came back and unlocked the front door and went straight to bed."

Boduel got up restlessly again. "I don't like your furniture," he said. "I had some Sheraton antiques in here; and

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a fourposter bed with a figured canopy. And that dressing table!"

"We did our best," I said humbly, "with what we could afford."

"I suppose things are difficult these days. But tell me, is every murderer a madman? If not, why am I? The thing worked well enough. She had stolen out in the night—and I was broken-hearted. I told people she was away for a holiday, but I let the vicar know in confidence that she had left me for Trelowarren, and that way it got about. The whole thing was quite clever, I thought, because even if anyone had suspected the truth there could have been no proof of it. To do that they would have had to spend £200,000 draining the mines. Even with the present price of tin you can't afford to lay that much out."

He went across again to the window, and peered out. The light glinted on knife edge, signet ring, tie pin, bald head. Then he went to the door and opened it an inch and listened. A man's voice could be heard downstairs.

"That's only one of my farm hands," I said nervously. "He'll do you no harm."

He smiled sadly. "I came back to see what it was like. Living in that other place I used to *wish* myself back here. I used to dream about it. But there's no *real* life for me here. Things have moved on. They always do. I'm a stranger now, an intruder. Besides . . . they'd look for me here in the end."

"What are you going to do?"

"In a way I suppose she's won, the bitch. So it would be appropriate if I joined her. I've always wondered what it must feel like to go straight down an air adit."

"Don't be a fool!"

"These rugs," he said. "They're terrible. You should go to Wherry's of Plymouth. They import direct. Mention my name, if you like."

He stood half in the door, brooding. "But they'll have *forgotten*. Everything is forgotten in a few years. That's why I'd like you to remember me and what I've told you. Nobody else knows the truth. I did want someone to know."

He was gone.

In the December daylight I found myself staring at my own cold face in the glass. It was drawn and older than I remembered it last night. Then the front door slammed. I dug my feet into slippers, snatched a coat from the wardrobe, ran

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downstairs and out. Round the corner Aukett was standing, gaping.

"That man, sur, he's just been in your 'ouse. He looked like—"

"Stop him!" I shouted.

I ran through the walled garden with the remnants of ungathered prunings cracking under my feet. I could hear the tramp of Aukett close behind me. At the broken gate I stopped. Boduel was already on the wall beside the mine, his stocky figure like a pin-man against the bright morning sky. Right beside him was the ruined finger of the mine chimney.

I shouted to him and ran on, but he jumped down the other side. I got to the wall and pulled myself over. He was already on the rim of the low wall round the air shaft. I shouted again.

He saw me and lifted an ironical hand in which the butcher's knife still gleamed. Then, as I started forward again, he jumped.

From where I was I couldn't hear much, but as I reached the wall the echoes of his fall were still coming up the shaft.

They recovered his body. A difficult job, but fortunately it was lodged about three hundred feet down on some timbers across the further drop.

The woman's body was never found.

I wired Philippa to stay away until the inquest was over. It was an unpleasant business altogether.

Thinking it over in the weeks that followed, I wondered—as he clearly wondered—with what degree of greater ingenuity a supposedly sane man could have acted, always supposing the sane man had wished to dispose of his wife. The course he had followed—once embarked on—had the merit of simplicity, spontaneity and tidiness. The stumbling block in so many crimes is, of course, just that disposal of the body. Get rid of it, and even the utmost suspicions and the cleverest detectives are likely to stumble and fail.

That Boduel had made one mistake—in spite of his claim—did not become apparent until months afterwards, until well into the following summer. Philippa, who just never will allow things to rest, eventually located his wife, now living as Mrs. Trelowarren in South Africa, where she had fled with a man who in his spare time still writes Celtic poetry.

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THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD

INSIDE, out of the rain, the lunch wagon was hot and sticky. Al Groot stopped in front of the doorway, wiped his hands and wrung his hat out, and scuffed his shoes against the dirt-brown mat. He stood there, a small, old wrinkled boy of eighteen or nineteen, with round beady eyes that seemed incapable of looking at you unless you were behind him. He stopped at the door and waited, not sure of his reception, examining the place carefully, as if he might have need of this knowledge soon after.

It was a little fancier than the ordinary lunch room, having dark, old wood booths at the left that fronted the sharp, glittering stools and counter of well-polished chromium. A clock on the wall showed that it was after ten, which might have explained why the place was almost empty. There was no-one at the counter and the few truck drivers, sprawled out in two adjoining booths to catch a late dinner, were tired and very quiet, engrossed only in their sandwiches and hamburgers.

Only one man was left behind the counter, and he was carefully cleaning the grease from the frankfurter griddle, with the slow motions of a man who has a great deal of time on his hands and is desperately afraid of finishing his work, to face the prospect of empty tables and silent people. He looked at Al, uncertain for a moment how to take him, and then he turned back to the griddle and gave it a last studious wipe. He spoke, without looking up, but his tone was friendly. "Hi," he said.

Al said hello, watching the man scrape some crumblings off.

"It's a hell of a night, ain't it?" the counter man asked.

"Lousy."

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Norman MAILER

In 1941, a Harvard English professor entered a short story by one of his students in a competition. It won first prize for its author and made him decide on a writing career. His name was Norman Mailer. Argosy now publishes this story, which recently turned up again in an anthology, and proves that the author of The Naked and the Dead, The Deer Park and An American Dream had a golden touch even at the age of seventeen

"It sure is. Guess we needed it," he said. "The crops are hit bad when it don't rain enough."

"Sure," said Al. "Look, what does coffee and doughnuts cost?"

"Ten."

"Two doughnuts?"

"That's it."

"Uh-huh," said Al. "Could you let me have one doughnut and half a cup of coffee for five cents? I ain't got but a nickel."

"I don't know," he said. "I could, but why should I?"

"I ain't had nothing to eat today," Al pleaded. "Come on."

The man looked up. Al sucked expertly on his cheeks, just pulling them in enough to make it look good.

"I guess you could stand it. Only pay me now."

Al reached into his pocket, and tenderly extracted a nickel from two halves of a dollar bill. He finished over one-third of the doughnut in the first bite, and realising how extravagant he had been, he took a small begrudging sip of the coffee.

"Nice place," he said.

"I like it," the man said.

"You own it?"

"You're damn right, buddy. I worked to get this place. It's all mine. You don't find me giving anything away in it. Every cup of coffee a guy drinks feeds me too."

"Top of the world," Al said.

"Nyahr," he answered bitterly. "Lot of good it does me. You see anybody in here? You see me clicking the cash register? The hell you do."

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Al was thinking of how tough his luck was that the truck drivers should be uniformed, which was as good as a "no rider" sign. He grinned sympathetically at the owner, trying to look as wet as he could.

"Boy," he said, "I sure am stuck."

"Been hitching, huh?"

"Yeah, walked the last three miles, ever since it started to rain."

"Must be kind of tough."

"Sure, I figure I won't be able to sleep if it don't stop raining. That was my last nickel. Say, look, you wouldn't have a job for me?" he said stupidly.

"What'll I do, watch you work?"

"Then let me sleep here tonight. It won't cost you nothing."

"I don't run a flophouse."

"Skip it, forget it," Al said. "Only let me stay here a while to dry off. When somebody comes in, maybe they'll give me a ride."

"Stay," he said. "I have such fancy trade. New chromium, brass fixtures. Ahhhr."

Al slipped off the stool and sat down at a table in the rear, out of sight of the counter man. He slouched down against the side of the booth and picked up a menu—supported between the salt and pepper shakers—looking at it interestedly, but past all craving or desire. He thought that it had been almost a year since he had had a steak. He tried to remember what it tasted like, but his memory failed, and to distract him from the tantalising picture, he started examining the spelling on the sheet, guessing at a word first, then seeing how close he was. Another company truck driver had come in, and Al shot a quick look back to see where the owner was. Finding him up front, almost out of sight, he quickly picked up the ketchup bottle and shook large gobs of it into his mouth as fast as he could get it out. It burnt and stung inside his stomach, and he kept blowing, trying to cool his mouth. Noticing a few drops on the table, he took a paper napkin and squeezed them over the edge, where they hung, ready to fall. He ran his little finger along underneath, gathering them up, and catching the drops in his mouth as they dripped off.

He felt for the split dollar bill, and fingered it. This time, he thought, it was really his last. Once, three months ago, he had five dollars. He thought back and tried to remember how he had got it. It was very vague, and he wondered whether he had stolen it or not. The image of five separate bills, and

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all that he could do with them, hit him then with all its beauty and impossibility. He thought of cigarettes, and a meal, and a clean woman in a good place, and new soles to his shoes, but most of all he thought of the soft leathery feel of money, and the tight wad it made in his pants.

"By God," he said thickly, "there's nothing like it. You can't beat it. If I just had five dollars again."

He withdrew his hand, taking the two pieces out, smoothing them lovingly on the table. He considered breaking the bill for another doughnut, but he knew he couldn't. It was the last thing between him and . . . He stopped, realising that he had passed the last thing—there was no "and." Still, he did not think any more of spending this last bill. Tomorrow or tonight he would be in Chicago, and he could find something to eat for a day or two. He might even pick up half a buck by mooching. In the meantime he felt hungry. He stayed in the booth, staring at the end wall, and dreaming of his one-time hoard.

Three men came in to eat. Al saw them hesitate at the door, wondering whether to eat in a booth or at the counter.

"Take a booth," one said.

Al looked at them. This might be a ride, he thought. He waited until they had started eating, and then he went over to them, hitching at his faded grey-blue dungarees.

"Hi, sports," he said.

"Hello, sweet-face," one of them said.

"They call me Al Groot."

"His father's name was Groot," said one of them, turning to the others.

"I ain't asking for any dough."

They eased up a little. "Boy, you sure ain't, sweet-face," one of them said. "Sit down, sit down," he said. "My name's Cataract, account of my eye, it's no good, and this here is Pickles, and this is Cousin."

They all looked alike.

"I guess you know what I want," Al said.

"Ride?"

"Yeah, where you going?"

"Chicago."

"Start warming the seat up for me," Al said.

They grinned, and continued eating. Al watched Cataract go to work on a hamburger. He held it between thick, grease-stained fingers that dug into it, much as they might have sunk into a woman. He swallowed a large piece, slobbering a little,

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and slapping his tongue noisily against the roof of his mouth as he ate. Al watched him, fascinated. Wild thoughts of seizing the hamburger, and fighting the man for it, devilled him. He moved his head, in time to Cataract's jaws, and he felt madly frustrated as Cataract dropped the last bit into his mouth. Cataract lit a cigarette and exhaled noisily, with a little belch of content.

"Hell," Al whispered.

He turned his attention to the other two, and watched them eat each piece down to the very bitter end. He hated them, and felt sick.

"Let's go," shouted Pickles. "Come on, sweet-face."

The car was an old Auburn sedan, with a short humped-up body. Al sat in the back with Cataract; Cousin was driving. Cataract took out a pack of cigarettes, and passed them around. Al took the pack and fumbled with it, acting as if he were having trouble extracting one. When he handed it back, he had a bonus of two more cuddled next to his dollar bill.

"Where you from?" Pickles asked.

"Easton," Al said. "It's in Pennsy."

Cataract rolled his tongue around. "Good town," he said, extending his arm, fist closed, twisting it in circles at the wrist.

"Yeah," Al said. "One of the best. I ain't been there in four, no three years. Been on the road since."

"Hitching?"

"Hell, no," Al exploded with contempt. "It's a sucker's game, hitching. I work the trains; you know, 'Ride the rails in comfort with Pullman.'"

"Yeahr. How're the hobo camps?" Cousin asked.

It was Al's turn to extend his arm.

They all started laughing with wise, knowing, lewd laughs.

"What do you boys do?" Al asked.

They laughed again.

"We're partners in business," Cataract said.

Al looked at them, discarding one thing after another, trying to narrow down the possibilities. He decided they were sucker players of some sort.

"You guys know of any jobs in Chicago?"

"How much you want?"

"About twenty a week. I'm in now. Got thirty-four bucks."

Pickles whistled. "What're you mooching meals for, then?"

"Who's mooching?" Al demanded. "Did I ask you guys for anything besides a ride?"

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"Noooo."

"Awright, then don't go around being a wise guy."

Pickles looked out of the window, grinning, "Sorry, bud."

"Well, awright then," Al said, acting sore.

Cataract laughed, trying to be friendly. "They're funny boys, you know, just smart. They wished they had your thirty-four, that's all."

It worked, Al thought. He let himself grin. "It's okay," he said.

He looked out of the window. They weren't in Chicago yet, but the lights shining from the houses on the side of the road were more frequent, making a steady glare against the wet windows, and he knew that they must be almost at the outskirts by now. Just then, he saw a *City Limits* and *Welcome* sign flash past. Cousin turned off the highway, and went along for a way on a dirt road that in time turned on to an oil-stained asphalt street. They passed a few factories, and Al thought of dropping off, but he wondered if it might not pay him to stay with the men a while.

Cataract yawned. "What about a game of pool now, boys?" he asked.

So that's what they are, Al thought.

"Say," he said, "I'd like to play, too. I ain't very good, but I like the game." He had played exactly three times in his life.

Pickles assured him. "We're no good either—that is, I'm no good. You and me can play."

"Yeah," said Al, "it ought to be fun."

Cousin was driving up Milwaukee Avenue now. He turned left, slowing down very carefully as he did so, although there were no cars in sight.

"That Cousin drives like an old woman," Pickles commented. "I could drive faster going backwards."

Cousin jeered at him. "You couldn't drive my aunt's wheelbarrow. I'm the only guy left who hasn't lost his licence," he said, speaking to Al. "It's because I take it easy when I drive a car."

Al said he didn't know much about cars, but he guessed maybe Cousin was right.

The car pulled up in front of a dark grey building on the corner of a long row of old brownstone homes. It was a dark street, and the only evidence that people lived on it was the overflowing garbage cans and ash cans spaced at irregular

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intervals in front of the houses. The pool-room itself was down in the cellar, underneath a beauty parlour and a secretarial school. On the steps going down, Al could see pencilled scribblings on the walls; some hasty calculation of odds, a woman's telephone number with a comment underneath it, a few bits of profanity, and one very well-drawn nude woman.

The foot of the stairs opened right on to the tables, which were strung out in one long narrow line of five. The place was almost dark, only the first table being used, and no lights were on in the back. Pickles stepped over to the counter and started talking to the boss, calling him familiarly, and for some reason annoyingly, by the name Nick. Nick was a short, very broad and sweaty Italian. He and Pickles looked up at Al at the same time, and Pickles motioned to him.

"Nick, this is a pal of mine. I want you to treat him nice if he ever comes in again. Tell thick Nick your name, sweet-face."

"Call me sweet-face," Al said.

"H'lo," Nick said. "Pleased to meet you."

"Where we play?" Al asked. He noticed that Cataract and Cousin had not come down yet.

"Take number four."

"Sweet-face and me on number four," Pickles said, "Got it."

He walked down turning on a few lights. He stopped at the cue rack, and picked one at random. Al followed him, selected one carefully, sighting along it to see if there was any warp, and sprinkling some talc over it. "Should we play a rack for table?" he asked.

"Sure," said Pickles. "You mind if we play straight? I don't know any fancy stuff."

"Me neither."

They tossed a coin, and Al had to break. He shot poorly, hit the wrong ball and scratched. Pickles overshot and splattered balls all over the table. Al sunk two, shooting as well as he could, knowing that Pickles would notice any attempts at faking. They both played sloppily, and it took fifteen minutes to clear the table. Al won, eight balls to seven.

"We're pretty close," Pickles said. "What about playing for a couple of bucks this next table?"

He watched Cataract and Cousin who had just come in and were starting to play.

Al could feel the sweat starting up in the small of his back and on his thighs. I can still get out of it, he thought. At

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least I'll have my buck. The thought of another five dollars, however, was too strong for him. He tried to think of what would happen to him if he didn't get away with it, but he kept remembering how it felt to have money in his hands. He heard himself speaking, feeling that it was not he but someone right behind, or on top of him.

"Make it a buck," he said.

Pickles broke, again shooting too hard. Al watched him flub balls all over the table, slightly overdoing it this time. They finished the rack, Al getting a run of three at the end, to win, ten to five. Pickles handed him a dollar, and placed another on the side of the table. Al covered it with the one he had won. I wonder when he starts winning, Al thought. If I can only quit then. They played for a dollar twice more, Al winning both times. A first drop of perspiration drew together, and raced down his back. He saw Cataract watching them play, juggling two balls in his hand. They played for three dollars, Al winning, after being behind, five to two.

He straightened himself up, making an almost visible effort to relax.

"That makes six bucks," he said.

"Sure," said Pickles. "Let's make it five this time. I want to win my dough back."

This time Pickles won. Al handed him five dollars, separating the bills with difficulty and handing them over painfully.

"Another one for five," Pickles said.

Al looked around him desperately, wondering if he could get out. "Five," he croaked. Cataract was still juggling the balls.

It was the longest game he ever played. After every shot he stopped to wipe his hands. In the middle, he realised that this game was going to be given to him. He couldn't relax, however, because he knew the showdown would merely be delayed for another game or so.

He won, as he knew he would, but immediately the pressure was on again. They played once more for five, and he won. After it was over, he didn't trust himself to stand, and he leaned against the cue rack, trying to draw satisfaction from the money in his pocket. He dreamed of getting out, and having it all to do with as he pleased—until he saw Pickles and Cataract looking at each other. Cataract threw a ball up, and closed his fingers too soon, missing it. It came down with a loud shattering crack that made Nick look up from his counter. That's the signal, Al thought.

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They were the only ones in the place now.

Pickles stroked his cue, grinning. "Your luck's been too good, sweet-face. I think this is going to be my game. I got twenty bucks left. I'm laying it down."

"No," said Al. "I don't want to."

"Listen, I been losing dough. You're playing."

They all looked at him menacingly.

"I want to quit," Al said.

"I wouldn't try it," Cousin said.

Al looked about him, trapped, thoughts of fighting them mixing with mad ideas of flight.

Cataract stepped towards him, holding a cue in his hand.

"All right," Al said, "I'll play."

Pickles broke, making a very beautiful "safe," leaving Al helpless. He bent over his stick to shoot. The balls wavered in front of him, and he could see the tip of the cue shaking up and down. He wiped his face and looked around to loosen his muscles. When he tried again, it was useless. He laid his cue on the table and walked to the back.

"Where you going?" asked Pickles.

"To the can. Want to come along?" He forced a laugh from the very bottom of his throat.

He passed through a small littered room, where old soda boxes were stored. The bathroom was small and filthy; the ceiling higher than the distance from wall to wall. Once inside he bolted the door and sank down on the floor, whimpering softly.

After a while he quieted and looked around. The only other possible exit was a window, high up on the wall facing the door. He looked at it, not realising its significance, until a chance sound from outside made him see where he was and what was happening to him. He got up and looked at the wall, examining its surface for some possible boost. He saw there was none, crouched down, and jumped. His hands just grasped the edge, clung for a fraction of a second, and then scraped off. He knelt again, as close to the wall as he could possibly get, flexed himself, and leapt up. This time his palms grasped the hold. He pressed his fingertips against the stone surface and chinned up enough to work his elbows over. He rested a moment, and then squeezed his stomach in and hung there on the ledge against the window, his legs dangling behind. He inched the window open noiselessly and, forgetting he was in the cellar, looked down into blackness. For

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a moment he was panic-stricken, until he remembered he was in the cellar, and had to look up. He shifted his position, and raised his head. There was a grating at right angles to the window, fixed above a dump heap, much like the one beneath a subway grille. It was very dark outside, but he could make out that it opened into an alley. Overjoyed, he took his money out, almost falling off in the act, kissed it, put it back, and tried to open the grating. He placed his hands under it and pushed up as hard as he possibly could in his cramped position.

The grille didn't move. He stuck a foot through the window and straddled the ledge, one foot in, one foot out. Bracing himself, he pushed calmly against the grating, trying to dislodge it from the grime imbedded in it. Finding his effort useless, he pushed harder and harder until his arms were almost pushed into his chest and his back and crotch felt as if they would crack. Breathing heavily, he stopped and stared up past the grating. Suddenly, with a cry of desperation, he flung himself up, beating against it with his hands and arms, until the blood ran down them. Half crazy, he gripped the bars and shook, with impassioned groans. His fingers slipped against a little obstruction on one of the end bars. His hand felt it, caressed it, hoping to find some lever point, and discovered it to be a rivet between the foundation and the grille. He sat there, huge sobs torn from him, his eyes gazing hungrily at the sky above. After a bit, he withdrew his leg, wormed his body in again, closed the window, and dropped heavily to the floor, lying in a heap, as he had fallen, his face to the wall. I'll just wait till they come for me, he thought. He could hear someone coming towards the door. Pickles knocked.

"Hey, kid," he yelled from the other side of the partition, "hurry up."

Al stood up, a mad flare of hope running through him as he thought of the money he still had. He held his hand to his throat, and struggled to control his voice. "Be right out," he said, managing to hold it through to the end. He heard Pickles walk away, and felt a little stronger. He started to wash himself, to get the blood off. His hands were still bleeding dully, the blood oozing out thickly and sluggishly, but he was able to stop the flow somewhat. He backed away, glanced out of the window once more, and took his money out. He held it in his hands, and let the bills slip through his fingers. Gathering them up, he kissed them feverishly, rubbing the paper against his face and arms. He folded them

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tenderly, let down his pants and slipped the cash into a little secret pocket, just under the crotch. He flattened out the bump it made, and unlocked the door to go out. His heart was still pounding, but he felt both calmer, and more determined.

They were waiting for him impatiently, smoking quickly and nervously.

Al took out one of Cataract's cigarettes and asked for a match. He lit it, sucking deeply and gratefully from it. They glared at him, their nerves almost as tight as his.

"Come on," said Pickles, "it's your turn to shoot."

Al picked up his cue, gripping it hard to make his hand bleed faster. He bent over, made a pretence of sighting, and then laid his cue down, exposing the place where his hand had stained it.

"What's the matter?" Cousin snapped.

"I can't hold a cue," Al said. "I cut my hand in there."

"What do you mean you can't play?" Pickles shouted. "My money's up. You got to play."

"You can't force me. I'm not going to play. It's my money, it's mine see, and you can't make me. You guys can't pull this on me; you're just trying to work a sucker's game."

It was the wrong thing to say. Cataract caught him by the shirt and shook him. "Grab hold of that stick," he said.

Al wrenched himself loose. "Go to hell," he said. "I'm quitting."

He picked up his hat, and started walking down past the tables to go out. He had to pass three tables and the counter to get to the stairs. He walked slowly, hoping to bluff his way out. He knew he had no chance if he ran. He could feel the sweat starting up much faster this time. His shoulders were twitching, and he was very conscious of the effort of forming each step, expecting something to hit him at every second. His face was wet, and he fought down an agonising desire to turn and look at them. Behind him, they were silent. He could see Nick at the entrance, watching him walk towards him, his face expressionless. Fascinated, he hung on to Nick's eyes, pleading silently with him. A slight smile grew on Nick's face. It broke into a high unnatural laugh, squeaking off abruptly. Terrified, Al threw a quick glance back, and promptly threw himself on his face. A cue whizzed by, shattering on the far wall with a terrific smash.

Before he could get up, they were on him. Cataract turned him on his back, and knelt over him. He brought the heel of

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his hand down hard on Al's face, knocking his head on the floor. He saw them swirl around him, the pool tables mixed in somewhere, and he shook his head furiously, to keep from going out. Cataract hit him again.

Al struck out with his foot, and hit him in the shin.

"You dirty little bastard," Cataract said. "I'll teach you."

He slammed his knee down into Al's stomach. Al choked and writhed, the fight out of him for a moment. They turned him over, and stripped his pockets, looking for his money. They shook him.

"Where is it, sweet-face?" Pickles asked.

Al choked for breath.

"I lost it," he said mockingly.

"It's in his pants somewhere," Cousin said. "These rats always got a secret pocket." They tried to open his pants. He fought crazily, kicking, biting, screaming, using his elbows and knees.

"Come on," Cataract commanded, "get it off him."

Al yelled as loud as he could. Nick came over. "Get him out," he said. "The cops'll be dropping in soon. I don't want trouble."

"What'll we do with him?"

"Take him out on the road where no-one will hear you. After that, it's your imagination." He squealed with laughter again.

They picked him up and forced him out. He went with them peacefully, too dazed to care. They shoved him in the car, and Cousin turned it around. Al was in front, Cataract in the back seat, holding his wrist so he couldn't break loose before they started.

Al sat there silently, his head clearing, remembering how slowly Cousin drove. He looked out, watching the ground shoot by, and thought of jumping out. Hopelessly, he looked at the speedometer. They were going around a turn, and Cousin had slowed down to less than twenty miles an hour. He had jumped off freight trains going faster than that, but there had been no door in the way, and no-one had been holding him. Discouraged, he gave up the idea.

Cousin taunted him. "See that white sign, sweet-face? We turn left there, just around it, and after that it won't be long."

Anger and rebellion surged through him. They were taking away something that he had earned dangerously, and they

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were going to beat him up, because they had not been as smart as he. It was not fair. He wanted the money more than they did. In fury, he decided to jump at the turn. The sign was about a hundred yards away; it would be his last chance. He figured it would take seven seconds to reach it.

He turned around to face Cataract, his left elbow resting loosely against the door handle. He had turned the way his wrist was twisted, holding it steadyingly, so that Cataract would not realise the pressure was slackened. One, he counted to himself. "Look," he begged Cataract, "let me off. I ain't got the money, let me off." Maybe thirty yards gone by. Cataract was talking. "Oh, you're a funny boy, sweet-face." Another twenty. "Yeah, sure I'm funny, I'm a scream," he said. "Oh, I'm so funny." The sign, where was it? We should have reached it. Oh, please God, show me the sign, you got to, it's my money, not theirs, oh please. "Damn you, please," he shouted. "What?" Cataract yelled. Cousin slowed down. The sign slipped by. They started to turn. Al spat full in Cataract's face, and lashed out with his wrist against the thumb. His elbow kicked the door open, and he yanked his hand loose, whirled about, and leapt out, the door just missing him in its swing back.

His feet were pumping wildly as he hit the ground. He staggered in a broken run for a few steps, before his knees crumpled under him, and he went sprawling in the dust. His face went grinding into it, the dirt mashing up into his cheeks and hands. He lay there stunned for a very long second, and then he pushed hard with his hands against the ground, forcing himself up. The car had continued around the turn, and in the confusion had gone at least a hundred feet before it stopped. Al threw a stone at the men scrambling out, and plunged off into a field. It had stopped raining, but the sky was black, and he knew they would never catch him. He heard them in the distance, yelling to each other, and he kept running, his legs dead, his head lolling sideways, his breath coming in long ripping bursts. He stumbled over a weed and fell, his body spreading out on soft wet grass. Exhausted he lay there, his ear close to the ground, but no longer hearing them, he sat up, plucking weakly at bits of grass, saying over and over again, "Oh, those suckers, those big, dumb suckers. Oh, those dopes, those suckers."

At two-thirty, Al Groot, his stomach full, swung off a streetcar near Madison Street, and went into a flophouse. He gave the night man a new dollar bill, and tied the eight-five

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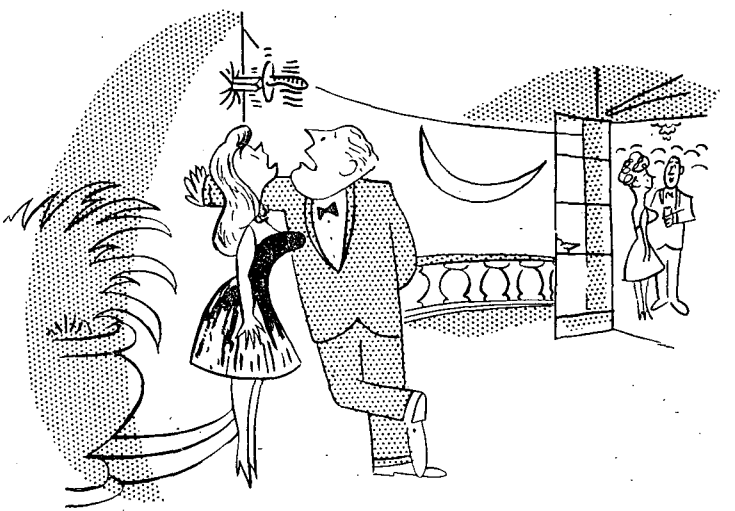
cents change in a rag that he fastened to his wrist. He stretched himself out on his bed and looked off in the distance for a while, thinking of women, and hamburgers, and billiard balls, and ketchup bottles, and shoes and, most of all, the thrill of breaking a five-dollar bill. Lighting the last of Cataract's cigarettes, he thought of how different things had been, when he had first planned them. He smoked openly, not caring if someone should see him, for it was his last. Al smoked happily, tremendously excited, letting each little ache and pain well into the bed. When the cigarette was finished he tried to fall asleep. He felt wide awake, though, and after some time he propped himself on an elbow, and thought of what he would do the next day. First he would buy a pack of cigarettes, and then he would have a breakfast, and then a clean woman; he would pay a buck if he had to, and then a dinner and another woman. He stopped suddenly, unable to continue, so great was his ecstasy. He lay over his pillow and addressed it.

"By God," Al Groot said, about to say something he never uttered before. "By God, this is the happiest moment of my life."



"Er . . . will you excuse me, Miss Dunbar? I think my wife wants me."

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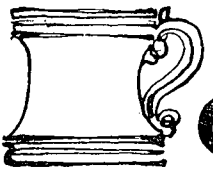

PUB CRAWL

I was indooced one night, by a seleck comp'ny of Britons, to visit sum 25 public-houses, and they confidentially told me that Garrick used to go to each one of 'em. Also, Dr. Johnson. This won't do, you know. ARTEMUS WARD, *1867*

Inn Sign

Charles Collins liveth here,
Sells rum, brandy, gin and beer;
I make this board a little wider,
To let you know I sell good cyder.

Free Beer

The barman drew a glass of beer, drank it, and drew another.

"I always have one with the customers," he said, "it puts us on even terms. Now we're just two heartbroken bachelors together." He sat down again.

"You can't tell me anything I don't know," he said. "I've seen over twenty chorines from the Empire in this bar, drunk as printers. Oh, les girls! les limbs!"

"Will they be in tonight?"

"There's only a fellow sawing a woman in half this week."

"Keep a half for me."

A drunk man walked in on an invisible white line, and the barman, reeling in sympathy across the room, served him with a pint. "Free beer today," he said. "Free Xs. You've been out in the sun."

"I've been out in the sun all day," said the man.

"I thought you looked sunburnt."

"That's drink," said the man. "I've been drinking..."

DYLAN THOMAS, *One Warm Saturday*

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Pubbishness

What is a pub? A pub is a haven, a retreat, a club, a fountain, a transport caff on the road to hell. A pub is full of old, mild and bitter characters, the right spirit, drunks, people who lent you a quid last Thursday, Scotsmen, tough barmaids who have only to look at you and say "It's *well* past time" to make you love them. You can get their smile out of your heart, but you can't get their crisps out of your teeth . . .

But enough of this nonsense. I propose to tell you exactly what pubs are like, or what they ought to be like. I know because I have been talking to a man who knows more about pubbishness than anyone alive.

Ben Davies is an architect. He is also a professional pub-crawler. The two often go together. He is a big, bearded, jolly character, who looks vaguely piratical. He designs new pubs for Ind Coope, the brewers, and he refurbishes old ones. And he runs regular courses for people on the management side, explaining what makes a pub a Pub.

He tells them there are five basic qualities: You must feel at home in a pub; you must feel welcome; you must want to meet friends there; you must feel a sense of continuity with past and future; there must be a "goodhearted" atmosphere . . .

HENRY FIELDING, *Sun, 11 March, 1965*

On the Road

At each inn on the road I a welcome could find,
At the Fleece I'd my skin full of ale;
The Two Jolly Brewers were just to my mind,
At the Dolphin I drank like a whale.
Tom Tun at the Hogshead sold pretty good stuff,
They'd capital flip at the Boar;
And when at the Angel I'd tippled enough,
I went to the Devil for more.
Then I'd always a sweetheart so snug at the Car;
At the Rose I'd a lily so white;
Few planets could equal sweet Nan at the Star,
No eyes ever twinkled so bright.
I've had many a hug at the sign of the Bear,
In the Sun courted morning and noon,
And when night put an end to my happiness there,
I'd a sweet little girl in the Moon . . .

Ballad, The Mail Coach Guard

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Notice in Bar

All you that bring tobacco here
Must pay for pipes as well as beer;
And you that stand before the fire,
I pray sit down by good desire,
That other folks as well as you
May see the fire, and feel it too.

Cross-patch

At a point on the road between Dunchurch and Daventry, where three roads meet, there was formerly an inn with the sign of the Three Crosses, in allusion to the three roads. Swift, in one of his pedestrian excursions, happened to stop at that inn. He was not very elegantly dressed and rather importunate to be served so the landlady told him that she could not leave her customers for "such as he"—upon which the Dean, who was neither the most modest nor the most patient of men, wrote the epigram on one of the windows:

TO THE LANDLORD

Thou fool, to hang three crosses at thy door!
Hurry up thy wife—she's cross enough for four.

JACOB LARWOOD and JOHN CAMDEN HOTTEN, *English Inn Signs*

"I was a boxer once myself."

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MR. CATESBY BRINGS IT OFF

by JOHN MOORE

THE nights grew cold after his wife ran away, so the Captain courted the blonde barmaid from The Lion, and soon he took her home to his semi-detached on the cliffs overlooking Swansea Bay.

To the neighbours he described her as his housekeeper; but the term had come into disrepute lately through a mistake on the part of a local weekly, which had printed an elderly farmer's advertisement for *Housekeeper, single, 25-30, strong, cheerful, willing,* in the column headed LIVESTOCK AND PETS. So the neighbours disbelieved the Captain's story, and their giggles and gossip hurt his pride.

He bought a remote little farm among the mountains, at a place called Cwm-y-Rwyddfa, and settled down there with his girl. He arranged to have her surname changed by deed poll, and innocently supposed that everybody round about would assume that she was his wife.

Far from it: the postman, the policeman, the minister from Capel Bethesda and an RSPCA Inspector known as Roberts the Cruelty—who came prying round and accused him of starving his cows—all in turn took it for granted that he was a widower and that Megan was his *daughter.* Once again his dignity suffered—in silence; he was too proud to argue with strangers about private affairs.

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So the matter went by default, and the girl remained his daughter as far as Cwm-y-Rwyddfa was concerned. This did not displease Megan, who would smile to herself about it now and then.

Captain Salvador Miguel Meredith-Jones was at that time a man well into his fifties, hawk-nosed and handsome, not unlike the pictures of Satan in Victorian editions of *Paradise Lost*, but with a large black moustache, which he touched up with a little dye whenever it showed signs of becoming grizzled. His mother had been Spanish, and he had never forgotten the language which he learned at her knee; he had a great store of its proverbs, which he translated for Megan's benefit. She didn't much like them, for they were what she called sarky. He knew Spain well, for his Welsh father had owned three small steamers which carried coal to Gibraltar and brought back ore from Huelva, olive oil from Malaga, oranges from Almeria. Salvador himself had gone to sea when he was sixteen and had got his master's ticket before he was thirty; but when his father died, leaving him a little fortune, he immediately retired in order to "look after his money." He looked after it so well that his wife, fed up with his cheese-paring, went off with an open-fisted bookie who crumpled pound notes into little balls and stuffed them into his trouser-pockets.

The Captain had refused to divorce her; detesting equally scandal and expense. In all respects he became increasingly mean; but this troubled Megan less than you might think, for she was a young woman who took the long view—the less he spent now, the more there would be in the bank when he was gone. She noticed that he became chesty in the cold weather, and coughed dreadfully at night. His heart was apt to pitter-patter, he said; and she remembered him telling her that his father had gone sudden, with his heart. She suggested calling a doctor, but he quoted one of his Spanish proverbs: "'God cures the patient, and the medico pockets the fee!'" Later that evening he suddenly quoted another: "'More people have died because they made their will than because they were sick'"—which caused Megan a moment of dismay, for in her mind she had been buying herself a nice little house not too far from the lights of London, and a leopard-skin coat, and a Mini, and a pleasure cruise on a liner where, sitting at a cocktail bar or splashing in a swimming-pool, she would at last meet him whom they called Mr. Right in the women's magazines.

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Meanwhile, however, she was not discontented with Cwm-y-Rwyddfa farm. She'd been brought up in the country; and now she milked the cows, fed the pigs and looked after the chickens. When two of the ewes died, she enjoyed bringing up their lambs on the bottle. As for the Captain, she was really quite fond of him in a way, despite his meanness and his sarkiness now and then. She was a little frightened of him too, which made life less dull than it would otherwise have been at Cwm-y-Rwyddfa.

Indeed, the couple might have continued to live there happily until death them did part—but for one of the cows falling sick, and the Captain ringing up the new young vet rather than the old one, because he reasoned that he might be both cheaper and more up-to-date.

A glow of yellow lamplight in the windows of the farmhouse gave it an air of comfort and homeliness which appealed to the young vet, who knew little of either. He lodged with a gaunt and bearded female called Mrs. ApHugh who treated him not half so well as her yapping Peke, Chinky, or her cat, Tib. She would slap down before him a tepid pot of tea, and a nearly cold plate covered by a quite cold plate, enclosing a small piece of fatty bacon and a broken egg fried into a beige-coloured shapeless slab, and she would say in her menacing fashion: "There's your breakfast, Mr. Catesby, and I trust you'll have no niggling complaints this morning." Then almost in the same breath she would coo to the cat: "Did it want the top of the milk with all the lovely cream on it then?" This morning Mr. Catesby had missed his breakfast altogether. He had been called to a calving case, and when he got back it was too late even for the fried egg—"You cannot expect to treat my house as a hotel, Mr. Catesby."

As he set out empty-bellied on his rounds, self-pity seeped through him with the dank November cold. He thought of all the things he would say to the bearded hag if ever he won a football pool. He cursed the lazy old skinflint for whom he worked as Assistant with a View to Partnership—if indeed he could ever afford to buy his share of the practice. He coveted the luck of film stars and heavyweight boxers and playboys who married heiresses. He gave himself indigestion with resentment and envy, and with the lumpy cheese sandwiches he gobbled for lunch. At three o'clock he rushed back to his Small Animals Clinic, which he hated because he'd acquired a distaste for small animals through his acquaintance with

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Chinky and Tib. Then, just as he was looking forward to thawing out his legs before the gas-fire in his digs, the surgery telephone rang and a man with a damnably imperious voice was saying, "This is Captain Meredith-Jones of Cwm-y-Rwyddfa." Another of those Welsh tongue-twisters! Mr. Catesby hated Wales because it was the native land of Mrs. ApHugh. "Spell it, please," he said, and the man did so, then pronounced it syllable by syllable as if to a child.

And here it was, ghost-grey in the fading light, lonely at the top of the valley between the steep hills; but it looked wonderfully welcoming to Mr. Catesby as he went up to its front door. He could smell bread baking, and he wondered whether he would be offered some tea. If a man had a pretty young wife for company, he thought, one who could bake and roast and make a Yorkshire pudd. crisp on top and soft inside like his mother had done in Huddersfield, it wouldn't be a bad life, even in this back-of-beyond. He was impressed by the contrast between the farm's snug security and the wildness of the surrounding hills. He would like to lie in a feather-bed cosy beside that Yorkshire-pudding-maker and, as he cuddled her, hear the bitter wind blowing round the chimney-pots.

So he was thinking, when the door was opened and there stood just such a plump and cosy girl as might indeed have warmed a man at the chilliest season. Because of what was in his mind he felt himself blushing, and she stared at him in surprise, as if to say: "The new young vet! Goodness how shy!"

"This is Captain Meredith-Jones'?" he stammered.

"Of course. And you have come to see the cow." Already she was kicking off her shoes and stepping into a pair of gumboots. "She calved yesterday morning quite easy; today she went as if she was drunk, wild-eyed like, and now she's down on her side, and all blown up her stomach is, her legs sticking out straight and stiff." She led Mr. Catesby out to the stall where the Friesian lay.

He leaned down and passed his hand in front of her eye. The eyelid did not move. Coma. Milk fever. "Nothing much to worry about," said Mr. Catesby. "I'll have her up within an hour."

Most of the farmers he dealt with believed they knew more than he did; and they were probably right. He would have been less than human if he had lost this chance of showing off a bit in front of somebody who might be impressed by his professional skill.

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As he opened his leather case and brought out the big syringe, the girl stood close by his side, attentively watching him; and suddenly he was surprised by a powerful whiff of scent, unexpected at any time in a cowshed and quite without precedent in Mr. Catesby's working life, which was accompanied by a mixed aroma of disinfectant, pungent animal medicines, and muck. He was so excited that he feared she would see his hand trembling as he prepared to inject the cow. It was all he could do to keep his mind on the job. When it was done he glanced up and found himself looking straight into the girl's eyes. Her frank gaze, and the smile that went with it, gave him a confidence which he generally lacked.

"You'll see. She'll be as right as rain in less than an hour," he boldly predicted, adding rather grandly as he put away the syringe: "Calcium Borogluconate"—a sonorous phrase.

Megan continued to gaze at him admiringly. "You'll be wanting to wash your hands," she said at last. "And of course you'll stay to tea."

She led him back into the house, and left him in the wash-place while she put the kettle on the kitchen fire. Then she took him into the parlour, which was just as he had imagined it would be, as warm as his lodgings were cold. Birch logs crackled on the fire, and a big oil-lamp cast a kindly glow upon the azure backs of the stuffed kingfishers, the copper-lustre china, the row of Toby jugs and the sailing-ship in a bottle which had pride of place on the mantelpiece. A pipe-rack on the wall reminded Mr. Catesby of the owner of the house.

"Is your father not in?" he asked. And he failed to notice her moment of hesitation before she replied: "I expect he's gone down the paddock to shut up the hens. The foxes have been terrible about here ever since the myxie... I'll go and make the tea." And she gave him a look over her shoulder which warmed his spirits quite as much as the fire was warming his legs.

How cheerful the pictures were—mostly of blue seas and foreign parts, much nicer than the yellowing photograph of the late Mr. ApHugh as a Royal and Ancient Buffalo which hung upon the wall in his digs. A painful and desperate longing for domesticity nearly overcame Mr. Catesby. The new-bread smell, as Megan entered with the tray, did nothing to assuage it. There was farm butter, with little drops of moisture glistening on it like tears of joy where the pat had been cut in two; there was home-made blackberry jelly, with

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the jar labelled in a girlish hand *B. Jell. '65*; there was a generous globular old-fashioned teapot clothed in a thick, quilted tea-cosy obviously tailored to fit it, for the short brown spout protruded out of it like the head of a well-rugged horse.

During tea, when he wasn't looking at Megan, Mr. Catesby's eyes would dwell upon this object, and he would reflect sentimentally that the very word tea-cosy seemed to epitomise his present situation, which he wished could continue for ever.

"How the days do draw in!" sighed Megan at last. "Pull the curtains I must." She got up to do so, and with the idea of helping her Mr. Catesby got up also. As they stood side by side at the fireplace he was enveloped once more in her attendant aura of scent. In a new access of nervousness he picked up the ship-in-the-bottle and pretended to study it.

"Was your father perhaps a seafaring gentleman?"

After an imperceptible pause she nodded.

"I've heard they tie a piece of thread to the mast," he said, "and when they've got the ship inside they pull this thread and up goes the mast and all the rigging."

"Really?" said Megan, in her most ladylike voice. Peering hard into the bottle (though she could scarcely have been less interested in anything) she half-leaned against him, and Mr. Catesby was aware of her thigh pressed against his, soft as that quilted tea-cosy save for a sharp knobbly lump which he supposed to be something to do with her suspender-belt and which therefore lent a fearful intimacy to their juxtaposition.

At that very moment the door opened and the Captain took two long dramatic strides into the room. He carried a hurricane lantern, in which the flame flickered as he swung it. His moustache alone was enough to alarm poor Mr. Catesby, who upon his entrance had jumped at least a yard sideways. Megan had done much the same thing in the opposite direction; and of course this sudden flying-apart made them look very guilty and feel very foolish indeed. Mr. Catesby still clutched the ship-in-the-bottle, and juggled with it awkwardly as he prepared to offer the Captain his right hand. As for Megan, her agitation was pitiful to see. She blushed and she trembled. Mr. Catesby had heard of Victorian fathers ready to horse-whip any of their daughters' suitors of whom they did not approve; and since Wales in his view was not so much Victorian as medieval in its customs, he was quite prepared to believe that the terrible Captain, with his blazing eyes and his fierce moustache, might be a tyrant of that nature. To his great alarm, the man now addressed him in a foreign tongue.

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What the Captain actually said was: "'*Quien arecha por agujero ve su duelo.*'" After a suitably impressive pause he translated it for his hearers' benefit. Megan had already guessed that it would be sarky. It was. "'He who spies through a keyhole will see what will vex him,'" said Captain Salvador Miguel Meredith-Jones.

There was a silence, during which the hurricane-lantern popped and flickered, Mr. Catesby dared not look in the direction of Megan, and the Captain's formidable moustache seemed to twitch as he treated them both to a tigerish smile.

At last he spoke again, "Well, Mr. Catesby, you are a quick worker," he said.

More terrified than ever, Mr. Catesby was moved to justify himself. He always stammered at moments of stress; he was now so foolish as to try to explain, in a series of stutters, that he and Megan had been studying the problem of how ships got into bottles. It made no sense at all, and the Captain cut him short with a gesture.

"I was referring, sir, as it happens, to your *professional* skill. The cow is on her feet. Excellent. No doubt in due course I shall receive your bill."

He held open the door; and with the merest shamefaced farewell glance towards Megan, Mr. Catesby took the hint and shuffled through.

A couple of months went by before Mr. Catesby received his second summons to Cwm-y-Rwyddfa farm. In the circumstances he was surprised, though gratified, to be asked there again. He concluded that he must have made a better impression on the Captain than he had supposed; conveniently forgetting that his desire to see Megan again had induced him to send a ridiculously small bill for his previous visit.

On this occasion his patient was a pig; and once again Mr. Catesby was fortunate. He hadn't the faintest idea what was the matter with the animal, for pigs were puzzling in their ailments, and in Mr. Catesby's experience one could only be quite sure of one's diagnosis if the trouble was a broken leg. This pig, however, ran fast on all four legs when Mr. Catesby, syringe in hand, pursued it round and round its muddy pen. Once he slipped down in the mud, and caught a glimpse of the Captain's sardonic smile. He was glad Megan was not watching.

Catching up with the pig at last, he pumped into its backside a large dose of penicillin, and with a confidence he was very

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far from feeling he said to the Captain, "I think you will see a great improvement tomorrow."

Next evening Megan rang up to tell him that the pig had quite recovered. He was really the cleverest vet. The Captain, she said—and in his excitement at hearing her voice he failed to notice that it was an odd way to speak of him—the Captain was shutting up the ducks. "We can have a good natter." They did.

It turned out to be a rough winter and a tardy spring. The Captain's half-starved animals were perhaps more subject than most to the ills attendant on bad seasons: or perhaps—since Mr. Catesby now refrained from sending him any bills at all—the Captain was not averse to taking advantage of a free veterinary service. And with what glad haste Megan would rush to the telephone whenever the Captain told her: "Send for the vet!" Their romance blossomed and thrived against a background of weirdly-named animal ailments, such as pulpy kidney, twin-lamb disease, louping-ill, and orf. They held hands behind hayricks and snatched kisses in cowsheds. Upon one or two occasions when the Captain was up on the mountain looking to the sheep they made still better use of their opportunities, for Megan had discovered that her bedroom window gave an excellent view of the hillside opposite; at the cost of no greater distraction than a quick glance now and then, you could reassure yourself that he was still half a mile away. His thin and spavined pony was by no means up to his weight. The mountains were steep. It was surprising what a lot of ground love could cover while he covered a mere half mile.

Megan had very little difficulty in finding excuses for her deception. For one thing, the Captain was fifty-five. Couldn't help it, but a man ought to regard himself as past it at fifty-five. For another thing, love justified anything; and Megan had persuaded herself that she was very much in love. Maybe Mr. Catesby wasn't *exactly* the image of Mr. Right that she had conjured into her daydreams; he had, for example, a tendency to spots, especially on the back of his neck between his rather close-cropped hair and his collar. But this was a small consideration in relation to the fact that he was the only male under fifty whom Megan saw for months on end.

As for Mr. Catesby, his ardour in courtship had been reinforced by a piece of intelligence which came to him by chance through a friend who worked in a lawyer's office.

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This young man, more callow and even spottier than Mr. Catesby, was the only person in the world who looked up to him; they used to spend Saturday evenings together drinking beer and talking about girls, especially the wantonness of girls, of which they knew much by hearsay. Now that, for the first time, Mr. Catesby had experience of this wantonness, no wonder he boasted about it to his admiring friend, who at the mention of Cwm-y-Rwyddfa immediately pricked up his ears.

"Meredith-Jones?" He dropped his voice to a whisper. "Well, if that isn't the miserable old skinflint who came into our office to make his will the other day! He's got oodles of money, my boss says; and won't spend a bean. I had to make a copy of his will; promise you won't breathe it to a soul if I—"

"Promise!" said Mr. Catesby breathlessly.

"Oodles of money; and he's left it all to his daughter! The farm and everything, the whole caboodle. If you've wangled your way in there," said Mr. Catesby's friend, goggle-eyed at the thought, "I can tell you you're on a jolly good wicket, old man!"

After that, you may be sure, Mr. Catesby was troubled less often by his trifling fastidious wish that Megan had been, say, seven years younger; and he was able to put out of his mind altogether such pernickety preferences as he had for brown eyes rather than blue, for long thin legs rather than short plump ones, and for straight dark hair rather than frizzy blonde hair which looked as if it might have been dyed.

On a blue morning in the very early spring when the first lambs were white specks all over the far mountainsides, Megan rang up Mr. Catesby very excitedly and told him: "He's gone off to market for *the whole day* ... And the baby ducks have got the sprawls," she added, as an afterthought. "I think you'd better come out quickly and see what you can do about the sprawls!"

So the young vet in his old car drove so fast to Cwm-y-Rwyddfa that the radiator was spouting like a whale long before he got to the top of the pass between the mountains. At the farmhouse he was greeted by the delicious smell of a stew cooking and a strong whiff of Megan's scent; in combination they provoked a confused reaction, by no means disagreeable, of amalgamated passion and greed.

Megan, when she had kissed him, nodded in the direction of the kitchen and smiled slyly: "It's the remains of the Sunday joint. I'll have to tell him the cat got it—the old

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meanie!" She had discovered the key of a locked cupboard from which she had filched a bottle of Spanish wine. "He'll never notice it's gone." On the laid table there was a crusty loaf and a large pat of butter, yellow as marsh-marigolds, and some Caerphilly cheese. There was also a bowl of walnuts, of which Mr. Catesby was inordinately fond.

"I thought we'd have a feast," said Megan. "Just you and me. But there's plenty of time before the stew's done. We mustn't waste it."

Nor did they. Indeed, by the time Megan turned her thoughts once again towards the oven, the stew was so overdone that most of the meat was stuck firmly to the bottom of the casserole, and the onions and carrots had gone dark brown. However, they were able to sort out a few edible pieces and by the time they had drunk the whole bottle of wine between them Megan was apt to get the giggles whenever she thought of the reason why she had let the stew burn. Mr. Catesby spread the deep-yellow butter on slice after slice of bread, balanced on top of it a good lump of cheese, and thought of Mrs. ApHugh's stale loaf and her mean portion of marge. Then he started on the nuts, and cracked some for Megan, and soon they went over to the sofa by the fire, where they nibbled and canoodled, and Mr. Catesby thought sentimentally that marriage must be rather like this, a matter of eating and cuddling in endless permutations. So he plucked up his courage and then and there invited Megan to marry him.

"Say yes, and I'll ask your father the moment he comes back from market!" cried Mr. Catesby.

Her response to this suggestion surprised him. At first she giggled; and then she squeaked in what seemed to be genuine alarm. When she squeaked she struck a note that was nearly as high as a bat's squeak.

"Don't you dare say a word to him—"

"Why ever not?"

"He'd be wild at you. I don't know what he'd— *No!*" squeaked Megan in growing agitation. "*No! No!* I can't explain. You wouldn't understand—"

"Of course I understand," said Mr. Catesby soothingly, slipping his arm once more round her plump waist. "He'd be very sorry to lose you and I don't blame him either. We must try to win him round together. We must somehow put it into his head that what he needs is a good housekeeper—"

At this her squeak became so high that it seemed to ping upon Mr. Catesby's eardrums and then like the bat's squeak

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it went out of his sonic range altogether. Instead, another sound suddenly impinged upon his ears. The front door opened, and very quietly shut. The Captain had come back early from market.

Megan leapt to her feet.

"I will ask him now," said Mr. Catesby, made bold by half a bottle of Rioja, rough but strong. Megan then seemed to lose her nerve altogether, and as the Captain entered the room she dodged round behind him and bolted through the door like a rabbit. Mr. Catesby listened to her footsteps, none too light, thumping rather than pattering up the stairs.

The Captain glared at him.

"Well, Mr. Catesby," he began. "Which of my animals are you attending to today?"

Mr. Catesby had struggled up from the low sofa; he knew his mouth was smothered in lipstick and he must look like a clown. He sought refuge from his absurd situation in an absurder formality.

"I am glad you have come home, sir, because there is something I have been wanting to say. I wish to ask you for—for—" He blushed and hesitated, and remembered the phrase which he'd read in some old book; ridiculously it sprang to his lips—"for Megan's hand in marriage."

The Captain's eyes opened so wide that Mr. Catesby could see the whites all the way round them. He took a pace forward, threateningly. His angry stare travelled from Mr. Catesby to the empty bottle on the table, to the remains of the meal, then up to the ceiling. From Megan's bedroom came a faint, hysterical sobbing.

The Captain's stern silence became unbearable.

"I expect—er—you had lunch in town?" said Mr. Catesby, desperately trying to make conversation. Then he wished he hadn't, as the Captain picked up the casserole and examined it curiously.

"My mother's people have a proverb," he said at last. "'Love is a furnace, but it does not cook the stew.' However, they have another saying, 'There is no sauce like a good appetite.' Pray be seated while I put it to the test."

The wretched Mr. Catesby sat down on the extreme edge of one of the chairs which was drawn up to the table. The Captain fetched himself a knife, fork and plate, and took the place opposite him. He helped himself to some small pieces of the stew, turning each one over several times to see whether it was composed of burnt meat or burnt carrot. As he did

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so, Mr. Catesby in awful fascination watched his moustache twitching like a cat's whiskers.

Meanwhile the Captain was thinking fast. The girl was a slut. Twitch. She was deceitful. Twitch. She was not all that to look at, she was getting blowzy, she was Letting Herself Go. Twitch. She was a petty thief. Twitch. She was improvident with the housekeeping money and incapable of understanding that saved pennies added up to pounds. (How often had he quoted to her his dear old mother's precept: 'Grain by grain the hen fills her crop'?) The Captain tried to make a calculation in his mind, setting the few amenities provided by Megan against the expense of keeping her. He discovered a debit balance; and promptly he made up his mind.

"Call the girl down," he said to Mr. Catesby.

Mr. Catesby went obediently to the door and shouted up the stairs. "Megan! Your father wants you."

The Captain grinned tigerishly to himself. Mr. Catesby returned, there were galumphing footsteps up above, and shortly after Megan appeared, dabbing her face with a powder-puff.

"Come here," commanded the Captain, so sharply that her bottom waggled agitatedly as she hurried into the room. Her tight skirt was rucked up on one side and hung down on the other. One of her stockings sagged. The Captain observed her contemplatively. He eased himself back in his chair.

"Mr. Catesby has informed me," he began, "that despite appearances to the contrary his intentions are entirely honourable. I understand that he wishes to marry you; and I have decided to give my permission and—er—my blessing. In the cupboard from which you took the Rioja you will find also a half bottle of Spanish champagne. Kindly fetch it."

Megan's mouth made a perfect O but no sound came out of it. She turned to Mr. Catesby, she turned back to the Captain.

"Fetch it," he barked again. "And bring three glasses."

Megan's O grew larger and larger; but if she squeaked it was another of her supersonic ones.

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?"

One had to admit, thought Megan, as she peeped sideways at the Captain through her veil, that it was wonderful how he had come round to it. There must be some good in him reelly, for who'd have thought he'd have hired the village hall and laid on a reception for nearly twenty people, eats and all

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—and him so mingy? Who'd have thought he'd have bought a dozen bottles—well, not of champagne but of champagne cider, which was the same colour and had the same sort of fizz, so that if you took the labels off nobody would know the difference? He'd even asked one or two of his relations to the wedding, because Megan, who was an orphan, hadn't got any of her own whom she was very proud of, and it wouldn't look well if all the guests belonged to the bridegroom's family.

Megan hadn't yet met the Captain's relations. She believed he had a brother and sister still living; and that dark pretty girl whom she'd caught a glimpse of as she walked up the aisle—she was probably his niece.

"*To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,*" her bridegroom was mumbling.

His Yorkshire accent was more marked than ever, because he was so nervous, she supposed. Even in this moment of solemnity she was aware that he wasn't Mr. Right *exactly*. Unfortunately, he had acquired a large new spot on the left side of his nose, just in time for the wedding. He was making heavy weather of the things he had to say. Megan confessed to herself that he hadn't got much gumption. When they started married life in the little semi-detached he'd rented, she was the one who'd have to tell him how to go on. And that'd be a change, thought Megan, after life with the Captain, who during their very first week together had repeated to her seven times one of his sarky proverbs. She had heard it so often that she knew it by heart: Sad is the house where the hen crows and the cock is silent.

But the old misery must be rather fond of her, she thought, in spite of his sarkiness. Otherwise he wouldn't have left her all his money—and she knew there was a hell of a lot of it in the bank. The farm and the furniture too: "the whole caboodle." That was the phrase Mr. Catesby had used. She would scarcely have believed it if he hadn't told her that he had it straight from the lawyer's clerk, his best pal, the one who stood beside him now, fumbling for the ring—goodness, he was feeling in both his pockets, he looked pretty wet, she hoped he hadn't lost it! With all that money, she thought, life with Mr. Catesby would be very tolerable, whether he turned out to be Mr. Right or whether he didn't.

She took another timid peep through the left side of her veil. The Captain, she decided, was looking rather old, and not at all healthy . . .

As he fingered it nervously at the reception, Mr. Catesby

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became quite certain that the new spot on the side of his nose would turn out to be a boil. This suspicion had already driven him to drink half a dozen glasses of the champagne cider, which far from cheering him up seemed to leave as sour a taste upon his spirit as it did upon his tongue. Not even the whispered encouragement of his friend the best man—"Never mind, old chap, at least you've brought it off"—did much to comfort him. Nor did the Captain's proposal of the Happy Couple's health. Megan had warned him it would be sarky, and it was. She reacted with nervous giggles, either through nervousness or because she'd had too much to drink. In Mr. Catesby's ears they were as shrill as the squeals of those little pigs upon which from time to time he performed a small, necessary operation.

The Captain, who had heard the sound many times before, winced. He looked rather sadly towards Mr. Catesby and quoted another of his depressing proverbs: "'For a marriage to be happy the husband should be deaf, and the wife blind.'"

This provoked much laughter from the wedding guests, who reacted more happily to the cider than Mr. Catesby had.

The best man, chuckling most tactlessly, took him by the arm and said, "He's certainly a card, the Captain . . ." He dropped his voice. "More to him than you'd think. They say he actually kept a *liebchen*—may still do, for all I know. *At his age!*"

The awful import of this was at first lost upon Mr. Catesby; for he had just caught sight of a girl at the other end of the room, who was tall and slim, with long slender legs, and very dark straight hair, and dark dramatic eyes. She was so much the embodiment of all he desired in womankind that it was as if he were looking at a dream come to life. He fixed his gaze upon the exquisite creature and he could not take it away even though he knew that Megan by his side was glaring at him resentfully. He did not notice the approach of the Captain, whose grating voice brought him to his senses suddenly.

"Very pretty girl, eh?" remarked the Captain, "though I says it as shouldn't. I must bring her along and introduce you. I know you'd both be interested to meet my daughter—"

"Your—your—*what*?" gasped Mr. Catesby.

"Only child . . . my wife and I . . . parted a few years back . . . faults no doubt on both sides," murmured the Captain, who was in a very good humour and could afford to be generous. "Yes, my daughter. You can see the Spanish blood coming out in her, can't you?"

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"*Daughter!*" cried Megan suddenly in her very shrill voice, seizing her husband by the arm and squeezing it so tight that he could feel her sharp fingernails digging into his biceps. Once again her mouth made a big O, in which condition her whole face became far from attractive and she appeared to have several double chins. She turned away from the Captain and towards Mr. Catesby.

The Captain studied her expression with lively interest. She seemed to be seeing a lifetime of boils; and what was much worse, a lifetime of boils without any money.

The Captain took his eyes off her, and went closer to Mr. Catesby's side. Paternally, affectionately, indeed almost gratefully, he laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"My mother's people have a saying, '*Si tu mujer quiere*'—but you don't know the language, of course? My daughter over there—Consuela—she speaks it like a native. I'll put it into English. The saying runs: 'If thy wife tell thee to throw thyself from a balcony, pray God it be a low one.'"

And the Captain smiled his tigerish smile.

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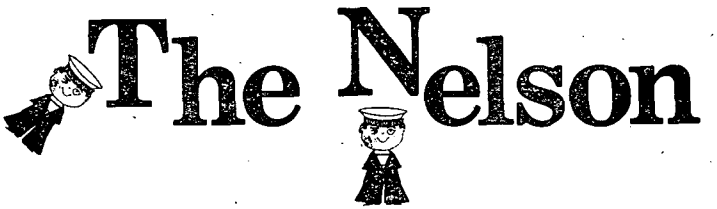

HMS IMPERVIOUS. All personnel will report to the Reverend Alan Raymond at the community centre on Saturday, June 5th, at 1100 hours for Flag Day Duty. Best Blue will be worn.

SEA CADET CUSHING read the notice with his usual air of detached interest. Then he tipped his sailor cap even farther over his thirteen-year-old eyes, and thought very carefully about what he had just read. When he had got things clear in his mind, he hitched up his bell-bottoms and rolled nautically ashore to find his bird.

Or, to put it in more landlubberly terms, he walked out of the Nissen hut that was *HMS Impervious*, into the back streets of Ingerby, where his Oonagh was waiting for him under a lamp post. He greeted her with an unsmiling, unemotional "Wotcher." Without a word she fell into step beside him. Together, grubby fingers interlaced, they set off for the chip shop.

"You won't mind taking over the secretaryship of the Ancient Mariners' Comforts Fund, will you?" they said. "There's nothing to it. Only got to organise a Flag Day once a year."

"I'd be delighted," said the Reverend Alan Raymond. New to his first curacy, he was only too eager to help anybody and everybody in the parish. But he remembered something. "I'll just have to ask the Vicar," he said.

"You don't want to worry about him," they said. "If you ask his permission every time, your life won't be worth living."

"I still think I ought to," said the Reverend Alan anxiously.

"What are you? Man or mouse?" they asked.

Alan considered. "Man," he said at last.

"Then," they said, "don't ask him. Tell him."

The Reverend Alan Raymond was worried. He regarded his Vicar much as the ancient Israelites regarded Jehovah.

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Touch

BY E. L. MALPASS

But when he discovered that out of the fifty-two Saturdays in the year, the Ancient Mariners' Comforts Fund Flag Day and the Vicarage Garden Party had both chosen the same Saturday, he was more than worried. He was damn near frantic.

Nor had he overestimated the Vicar's dudgeon. The Vicar was tall, commanding, and cold as a mountain peak. Expressing dudgeon was one of the things he did well. "But you *must* be at the Garden Party. The Curate's always been in charge of the hoopla, and I'm hanged if I'm going to start making changes at my time of life."

"But it's the Flag Day, sir. I've got to be in charge."

Whereupon the Reverend Alan Raymond came clean. And the Vicar made the very points that Alan knew he would make.

1. He, the Vicar, should have been consulted.
2. The Curate's job was to care for souls, not provide hot grog for shiftless old matelots.
3. Anyway, who was going to look after the hoopla?

And he fired one broadside that Alan had *not* foreseen. He sat back and said, "In our brief acquaintance, I have formed the opinion that you are ineffectual. I shall be interested to see whether your great efforts for the AMCF confirm that impression. Somehow, I think they will."

Alan had a pretty shrewd idea that they would, too. He *was* ineffectual; he knew it. He was pleasant, amiable, goodnatured and intelligent. But he had never learned the knack of overcoming the unrelenting bloodymindedness of events and things. For him stamp machines were always empty, for him telephone numbers were engaged, keys stuck, yet blandly turned for the first person who said, "Let me try."

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And it was, of course, just his luck that he should be asked to run a Flag Day for the AMCF in a town that was virtually in the centre of the industrial Midlands. Ingerby was the last place in which to whip up any wild enthusiasm for the Ancient Mariners, as he soon began to find out. Seventy per cent of the ladies he asked to collect were either expecting, not allowed to stand, or off on holiday. Alan Raymond began to fear he would be more ineffectual than he had ever been before.

And then—he had his wonderful idea. It was the sight of ten little boys in naval uniform propelling a barge up the Ingerby canal that inspired him. He would call in the Senior Service. He hurried home and wrote to the Officer Commanding, *HMS Impervious.*

It was when he had posted the letter that he read the police permit for the Flag Day for the first time. And discovered that no-one under sixteen was allowed to collect, unless accompanied by an adult.

It was at this fraught moment that he remembered Rosamund Finch.

Not that he ever forgot Rosamund Finch for very long. He admired her very much. She was serene and placid. Events and things did not seem to have it in for her as they had for him. It had even occurred to him on more than one occasion that, with her by his side, his journey through life would be more like a Rolls Royce on the M1, and less like a bicycle with a flat tyre on a cart track. But he had put such thoughts quickly from his mind. No-one on a curate's pay could support Miss Finch in the way of life to which she was accustomed.

He rang her up. Would she collect for him on Saturday, the fifth of June? Of course. Would she at the same time take about twenty naval personnel under her wing? She'd be delighted. They probably wouldn't be much over thirteen, he pointed out. She sounded disappointed. Still, she'd do it.

And now there was one good thing about Saturday, the fifth of June. One, and one only.

He was going to see Rosamund Finch.

The fifth of June was a lovely day, with tubby little cotton-wool clouds drifting across a sky of benevolent blue. The drab little town was gay with girls in summer frocks, and dogs ran dottily in the soft breeze, and cats snoozed, watchful, in the sun.

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And Miss Rosamund Finch was as happy as the sunny day. To the Reverend Alan Raymond, doomed to the grim surroundings of the community centre, her smile brought the warmth and friendliness of the sunshine outside. "It's awfully good of you to help," he said, looking at her with frank admiration.

"That's all right," she said. "The Vicar's livid with me for missing the Garden Party, of course, but—"

"He's livid with me, too," Alan said unhappily.

She looked at him quickly. "Does he make your life hell?"

He gave her a somewhat apologetic smile. "He does rather."

She put a friendly hand on his sleeve, making him feel quite faint with delight. "Don't let him push you around, Alan," she said. "You deserve better than that."

He looked at her with immense gratitude. She gazed back at him with clear and honest eyes. Alan had a dizzy feeling that if he put his arms about her and kissed those firm lips she wouldn't mind. Wouldn't mind? She might even kiss him back. He took a step nearer. "Rosamund!" he cried in a parched voice. But at that moment there was the brisk tramp of marching feet in the corridor. A few seconds later the room was awash with youthful *matelots*, all gleefully telling themselves that they'd interrupted a bit of snogging.

Alan sprang away, guilt in every movement. With fumbling haste he began to issue collecting boxes and trays of flags. Five minutes later Rosamund had departed with her naval escort into the sunshine, leaving Alan with an empty, but wildly beating, heart.

He was not alone for long. Five minutes later he heard more footsteps in the corridor. The door opened, Mr. Raymond looked at what must have been his twentieth diminutive jolly jack tar. The pattern was the same. White cap; knotted black ribbon round the brim, bearing the proud name *HMS Impervious*; sunburnt, not *terribly* washed, face; broad, three-striped collar, serge jacket, bell-bottoms. There was only one important difference from all the others. This one had brought his bird.

Mr. Raymond decided to ignore the bird for as long as he could, though he had an uneasy feeling it wouldn't be for very long. So he said, "Well, Nelson, what can we do for you?"

Cadet Cushing didn't mind the way grown-ups inevitably called him Nelson. The only trouble was that they always seemed to think it was highly original, and expected him to

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look amused. However, he was a tolerant child who found he got on quite well with adults provided he played along with them, humoured their little foibles, and above all didn't expect too much of them. So he saluted smartly and said, "Cadet Cushing, reporting for duty, sir."

Mr. Raymond wrote it down, gave him a collecting box and some flags. "And who's this?" he asked warily.

"Oonagh, sir. Cadet Osborne's sister. She's come to collect, sir."

Mr. Raymond began to write. He looked at Oonagh, who had a pale, waifish face and whose mousy hair was hanging down her back, and her front, and nearly everywhere. "What's your surname—" he began. He remembered. "Oh, of course. Osborne."

Cadet Cushing looked impressed at such mental agility in one of Mr. Raymond's—to him—advanced years. Mr. Raymond felt pleased and flattered. But Oonagh, glancing at what he had written, said derisively, "You've spelt my name with a U."

"Well, how do *you* spell it, for heaven's sake?"

"With an Oo," said Oonagh.

Mr. Raymond corrected his original entry. But ever since he'd seen these two his conscience had been digging an insistent elbow into his ribs. And now at last Conscience spoke. "What about the police permit?" it asked.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Raymond said sheepishly, pretending he'd forgotten all about it. But he'd remembered all right. The trouble was, he knew it was no good telling them to try to find Miss Finch and the others. Cushing and Oonagh, he felt in his bones, were individualists. Even if he'd sent them out with Rosamund they'd have wandered off on their own in two minutes. He regarded them anxiously.

"How old is Oonagh?" he asked.

Cadet Cushing nudged his beloved. "How old are you?" he asked.

"Fourteen next birthday," said Oonagh.

"She's thirteen," said the helpful Cushing.

Mr. Raymond wondered vaguely why it all had to be done through an interpreter. He said, playing for time, "When *is* her birthday?"

"November the fifth," said Oonagh.

At this, Cadet Cushing, who up till now had never smiled or even looked like smiling, burst into shrill sudden peals of uncontrollable laughter. It was shattering, rather like having

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a Chief Petty Officer giggle during Captain's Rounds. "Ruddy Guy Fawkes," crowed Cushing, and was rendered helpless once more by his own wit.

But Oonagh had got her fists at the ready. "Belt up, Custard," she said angrily. Mr. Raymond began to realise he'd got a lovers' tiff, or even a lovers' punch-up, to add to his troubles. Well, he soon brought them back to earth. "You're too young to collect," he said. "If you're under sixteen you can collect only if you're with an adult."

"But she'll be with *me*," cried the outraged Cushing.

Mr. Raymond looked at him. "With respect," he said, "you'd have an awful job persuading the police that *you* were adult."

"But I'm in uniform!"

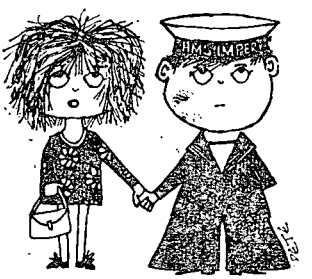
It was all very difficult. On the one side was the Reverend Alan Raymond, law-abiding citizen, to whom any contravention of the law was unthinkable. On the other was Mr. Raymond, organiser of the AMCF Flag Day, bent on as much loot as possible. It was a tug-of-war between the two. Then Cadet Cushing, perhaps sensing the struggle, said, "Nelson turned a blind eye, sir."

Mr. Raymond looked at the boy thoughtfully. Nelson might have done, he thought. But would the Ingerby police? He said tentatively, "Can I rely on you both to fade unobtrusively down a sidestreet if you see a policeman approaching?"

Cadet Cushing resumed his role of interpreter. "He means —beat it if you see a copper," he explained to the baffled Oonagh.

"I didn't mean anything of the sort," cried the appalled Raymond. "I just meant—exercise a little tact."

They both gave him a conspiratorial look that was probably meant to be reassuring, but which filled Mr. Raymond with the utmost misgivings. They set off on their charitable errand.



Mr. Raymond waited anxiously. He knew where he stood now—and he didn't like it. On one side were the forces of law and order. On the other was himself, horribly involved with two incalculable teenagers. He

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re-read the police permit. It brought him no comfort. It was like reading his own indictment.

A few adult collectors arrived, had their boxes emptied, and departed. No-one could pretend that things were going well. At this rate they wouldn't keep one Ancient Mariner in cut plug for a week.

He was disturbed by a low, cautious whistle from the open window. Startled, he looked up. Just above the sill he read the words, "*HMS Impervious.*" His heart sank. He walked across to the window. "What do you want?" he asked tetchily.

Cadet Cushing whispered. "There's a Garden Party at the Vicarage. We thought we could go and collect there."

"Good heavens, *no*," cried Alan.

They ignored this. "We'd have gone. But you have to pay to get in," Cushing said hopefully.

Alan Raymond said, "Now listen, you two. You are *not to go near* that Garden Party."

His two willing helpers looked crestfallen. "Oonagh ain't never been to a Garden Party," said Cadet Cushing.

"Well, she's certainly not going to this one." He tried to imagine what the Vicar would say if he found his Church funds being diverted into the eager hands of the Ancient Mariners, but imagination boggled.

"There wouldn't be no cops there," said Cadet Cushing, gazing at Raymond with the innocent eyes of youth.

"You are not to go," shouted Raymond.

They turned sadly away. It was quite clear that Cadet Cushing—though he didn't expect much from grown-ups—expected more than this. Surely, when you gave up your Saturday to good works, you ought not to be hampered and frustrated at every turn by adult timidity.

"Come on, Oonagh," he said. Disgusted was what he sounded.

Mr. Raymond went back to counting his money. Well, at least he'd scotched that little game. What the Vicar would have said . . .

Even so, he felt a heel. There had been a moment, early in the day, when he had actually basked in Cadet Cushing's approval. And very nice it had been too. But not any longer. He now knew that he had been weighed in a stern balance and found, to put it mildly, wanting.

The afternoon wore on. And now Mr. Raymond had a new worry. Twenty Cadets had set off gaily with collecting

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boxes—*his* collecting boxes—into the morning sunshine. So far not one of them had returned. Where could they be? Surely, by now, some of them must have filled their boxes? Surely, by now, some of them must have tired of the long day in the pitiless sun, even if Miss Finch hadn't. But where were they? He couldn't leave his post at the community centre. There was nowhere to lock up the cash. Where were they, these jolly jack tars? Gone, faded into thin air like the crew of the *Marie Celeste*.

The telephone rang. Mr. Raymond jumped a mile. He stared stupidly at the instrument. It went on ringing with the steady impatience of telephones everywhere.

He put out a reluctant hand and picked up the receiver. "Raymond here," he said, like a man holding out his wrists for the handcuffs.

"Hello, Raymond." But it was not, as he had expected, the curt voice of the law. He recognised the reproving, mellifluous tones of his superior. "Good afternoon, Vicar," he said warily.

"Raymond," said the voice. "Raymond. It is disturbing, when one is making a desperate effort to raise money for the Church roof, to find that one's funds are being siphoned off into some—nautical venture."

Once again Mr. Raymond's heart sank. And this time it reached an all-time low. He smiled ingratiatingly at the telephone. "I—I'm afraid I don't quite understand, Vicar," he stammered, understanding only too well.

"You *are* the secretary of the Ancient Mariners' Comforts Fund, I believe, Raymond?"

"Er, yes, I suppose so, sort of."

"Then you may like to know that your collectors are doing a roaring trade at the expense of my—our—Roof fund."

Mr. Raymond swallowed. "You mean—you mean they're at the Garden Party?" he asked lamely.

"*At* the Garden Party? My dear Raymond, at this moment they *are* the Garden Party. My lawn looks more like the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. It is a-swarm with naval personnel."

"They're only Cadets, sir."

"I don't care if they're Rear-Admirals. I want them called off."

"Are the boys being a nuisance?"

"On the contrary. They're extremely well-behaved. That's the trouble. No-one can resist them."

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Mr. Raymond said, "Look, sir. I can't come and fetch them. But if you could locate a thirteen-year-old bird with mousy hair hanging down all round—"

"Dash it, man. This place is full of birds with hair hanging down all round."

But Mr. Raymond refused to be deflected. "Her name's Oonagh, sir. With an Oo," he elaborated. "If you could get her to report to me I think you might find that she is the queen bee who will, er, draw off the swarm."

"Oonagh with an Oo," said the Vicar thoughtfully. "By the way, Raymond. Tell me. Isn't it an offence to let them collect under sixteen?"

"Yes," said Mr. Raymond.

"I thought so," said the Vicar sweetly, and put down the receiver.

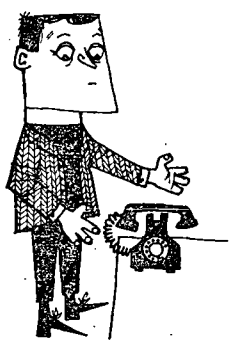
Well, it probably wasn't the first time Mother Church had indulged in a little quiet blackmail. But Mr. Raymond quailed. If those kids aren't clear of the Garden Party in ten minutes, he thought, the Vicar's going to dial 999.

But what could he do? He even thought of telephoning the police himself, and confessing all. If only *someone* would come, so that he could leave them in charge while he went and got his sheep out of their fields of clover.

Youthful voices were piping, *Heart of Oak*. The voices came nearer. The door opened. *Matelots* poured in; led of course, by Cadet Cushing and Oonagh.

"The man said you wanted us," announced Cushing.

"That," said Mr. Raymond, "is an over-simplification. What he meant was that *he* wanted you even less than I did." Unkind, he knew. But he'd suffered too much. "I thought I told you not to go to the Garden Party," he said sternly.



They let this pass. "We haven't half got a lot," said Oonagh with an Oo, banging a heavy box down on the table.

Her example was followed by all the naval personnel. But they didn't wait for Mr. Raymond to open the boxes. *They* began opening them, tipping the contents cheerfully on to the table which was soon a welter of silver and copper coins into which infant fingers delved joyously.

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"Please," Mr. Raymond cried helplessly. "*Please.*" When counting Church collections he was used to putting his money into neat little piles, and then into neat little paper bags, and then into neat big canvas bags.

But in the vestry, of course, he didn't have twenty naval cadets to help him.

However, between them they eventually got it sorted out, and Mr. Raymond struck a total that he felt was probably within two pounds either way. "Twenty-one pounds six and fourpence," he announced.

The Cadets looked gratified. Trying to sound casual, Mr. Raymond said, "Where would you say you got most of this? In the town or at the Garden Party?"

There was no doubt in the minds of his young hearers. "Oh, at the Garden Party, sir." And Oonagh, obviously speaking for one and all, said, "Skinny lot of nits in the town, they was."

"I see," said Mr. Raymond, wishing he hadn't a conscience.

But now Cadet Cushing was piping up: "Can we have expenses, sir?"

"Expenses? What on earth do you mean?"

"Twenty-one shillings, sir. They charge you a bob each to get in at the Garden Party."

"Don't reckon it was worth it," said Oonagh. "Reckon sixpence would've been plenty." She was a sententious little beast.

There were murmurs of agreement. Mr. Raymond rose. "Well, thank you, boys—and Oonagh," he added, bowing. "You've got me on the wrong side of the law, and I don't suppose my Vicar will ever speak to me again, but—well, you've got a good total, and—thank you."

They looked at him. Poor old nut, their youthful glances seemed to say.

They began to drift off. Cadet Cushing and his bird, fingers interlaced, were the last to go.

The Reverend Alan Raymond was left alone with his collection and his conscience. Well, at least the Church had got a guinea out of it, even if it was poorer by about twenty quid. But there was another question hammering at the back of his mind.

What on earth had happened to Rosamund?

Then he heard the brisk, cheerful clatter of her high heels. He rose as she came into the room. She banged a heavy

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collecting box down on the table. "Be careful. There's a ten bob note in there. I got it from the Vicar."

He looked at her in amazement. "You—you don't mean *you've* been to the Garden Party?"

"Oh, yes. I took the Cadets along. One of them suggested it, and I thought it was a good idea."

He was appalled. "But we needed that money for the Church roof."

"Now don't you start," she said cheerfully. "I've had all that from the Vicar. Ten minutes of it, till I quietened him down."

"How on earth did you do that?"

"Told him not to be an old fuddy-duddy. That took the wind out of his sails. Then I said that his own Curate was in charge of the Flag Day and he jolly well ought to support it, and he gave me ten bob."

Alan Raymond's mouth had fallen open. "Miss Finch," he said in an awed voice, "I think you're wonderful."

She smiled. Then she looked down at her feet. "Do you —Alan?"

"Yes." He groped for—and found—her hand. She let it lie in his. He said, "I—I—was wondering—of course it's ridiculous, but will you—"

The door opened. "You never gave us that twenty-one bob," Cadet Cushing said accusingly.

"—marry me?" concluded Mr. Raymond.

"Why, of course I will," cried Rosamund happily. "I began to think you were never going to ask me."

They kissed, while Cadet Cushing watched them with interest and not a little surprise; for, as he observed to his bird later, "You don't never think of parsons snogging, somehow."

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (NOVEMBER ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Haunting melody.* 9, *Union.* 10, *Gum.* 11, *Nadir.* 12, *Edentate.* 13, *Assess.* 16, *Easy.* 18, *Pastmaster.* 20, *Egyptology.* 21, *Inch.* 23, *Treble.* 24, *Manitoba.* 27, *Visit.* 29, *Ali.* 30, *Swiss.* 31, *Recording angel.*

Down. 1, *House detective.* 2, *Unite.* 3, *Tenets.* 4, *Negotiable.* 5, *Mama.* 6, *Landsman.* 7, *Dad.* 8, *Dress-rehearsal.* 14, *Eaten.* 15, *Stagnation.* 17, *Style.* 19, *Stole two.* 22, *Miasma.* 25, *Owing.* 26, *Band.* 28, *See.*

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ANNIVERSARY

by R. C. Hutchinson

'I've lowered my terms,' the Governor said agreeably. 'Six names, that's all I want now'

YES, I met him—I shook hands with him—shortly before he died, when I was a young graduate doing field research on South American history: the legendary José Alguarte, murderer of General Lugones.

"José Alguarte? Believe it or not, he's still alive," the Governor said, in the first interview he granted me, "though he was an oldish man at the time of the outrage."

He nodded with a certain complacency—the satisfaction of a librarian who instantly produces a rare volume.

"You want to see him? Well, as a rule he doesn't have visitors—the people who look after him feel it might be harmful. But you're in luck, I think. You're here for some time? Well then, Tuesday week is José's birthday party." He lowered his eyelids, hinting mystery. "Not his actual birthday, you understand—we don't happen to know exactly when he was born. But every year I invite José to a little luncheon on the anniversary of the assassination. If you, Señor Professor, would care to join us, you shall be my guest this year as well."

The State Penitentiary was then at Santa Sabeia, some thirty kilometres from the capital. To Santa Sabeia the Governor took me in his vintage Chevrolet, luxuriously upholstered and driven by a coloured chauffeur in resplendent livery.

"In the first two or three years of his imprisonment," the Governor said, as the car lurched and shuddered on a pot-holed road through endless banana plantations, "Alguarte was handled rather roughly. Herera—the successor to Lugones—was in some respects a simple fellow; he believed that sooner or later any man will tell you what he knows if he's sufficiently hurt and frightened." He smiled, giving me a generous view of his gold-stopped teeth, expressing with a gesture of his soft

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white hands a genial contempt for Herera's simplicity; he himself appeared a man of settled indolence, not subject to emotions of any kind. "But the next Governor, Colonel Ureña, realised that those tactics might never work with a type who'd clearly been feeble-minded since childhood. Yes, my predecessor Ureña was a man of high intelligence. And in dealing with this little problem I have been content to humbly follow him."

"You mean," I asked, "that you're still trying to get information out of Alguarte—more than ten years after the crime?"

"But of course! To you, Señor Professor, history is something to be locked away in school books. With respect, we whose business is politics can't afford to look at things like that."

A new note in his voice made me turn, while he was concentrated on preparing and lighting a cigar, to study his face more keenly. Now I saw that this was not after all an operatic figure, but a man whose outward laziness might clothe an ominous resolution.

"Remember," he continued softly, "that José can't possibly have been alone. Imagine the mere physical labour of collecting all the apparatus for wrecking a railroad train, transporting it to a site almost twenty kilometres from the nearest road—do you think that was a chore for one elderly man? And then again, look at the choice of place, the accurate timing. It was no imbecile who made all those calculations. If you care for figures, the experts in the police department have worked out that not fewer than ten conspirators must have been involved—most of them young, tough men, and anything but stupid. What we don't know is their names."

"And does that still matter, after nearly eleven years?"

"To me, señor, it matters a great deal. For one thing, I like to feel at ease when I travel on the railroad. You see, I have a wife, and young children. There are always men around who don't care for any sort of government—or governors. I want to keep tabs on those men."

"And you still hope to get the names from Alguarte, after all this time?"

The governor slowly nodded; in his somnolent olive eyes I saw (I thought) a fresh gleam of self-satisfaction.

"With a crazy type like José," he said, holding his cigar to observe the lengthening ash, "it can take years to make him see his own advantage. And since our last little birthday party

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my staff have found at least one new argument for me to put to him. I've just a hunch that this time José is going to see things my way—I figure we'll find him playing ball with me today."

The garden of the Prison Commandant was an irregular oblong of gravel fenced by agaves and tufted with a thin brown grass. There, when we arrived, a table had been set,

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half in the shade provided by a crescent of raphia palms. It had four places set, faced by four wicker chairs of which one was furnished with a cushion or two to soften its austerity. As soon as the Governor had settled himself on this seat of honour an Indian servant standing in attendance took a hand-bell from the table and rang it loudly.

Almost at once, on the path which came from the Commandant's house through a thicket of bamboo, there appeared a small procession, headed by the grandly-moustachioed Commandant himself in the full-dress uniform of the civil police, while a pair of *mestizo* soldiers, armed with rifles and festooned with bandoliers, brought up the rear.

These figures were, by comparison, commonplace; it was the one walking between them who, as the group drew nearer, fastened my attention. He was tiny, and immensely old, with deeply wrinkled skin and fine white hair which fell luxuriantly about his ears and neck. His salt-and-pepper suit—long in jacket and narrow in trouser-leg—was one that a European landowner might have worn on his country estate in the last decade of the previous century; well preserved, a trifle foppish to my eye, it was long out of date, and perhaps it was this outmoded dress which gave the old man an appearance of unreality. I felt as if the body of some historic personage, long embalmed in its own clothes, had been taken from the museum, given mechanically a semblance of life and paraded for my inspection.

"Prisoner and escort, halt!"

The little party shuffled to a standstill, then the Commandant took two more paces forward and performed an extravagant salute.

"The prisoner Alguarte, señor."

The Governor acknowledged the salute with a cursory nod; but as he stood up and turned towards Alguarte he seemed to melt into affability.

"Ah, José," he said, advancing and extending his hand, "my congratulations on yet another anniversary—the years pass so quickly! You know, of course, who I am? You remember this is the day you take luncheon with me?"

For some moments it appeared that the old man remembered nothing: he stood blinking against the ferocious sunlight, his lower lip and jaw working as if on a spring. Then the wizened face cracked, a throaty giggle came, and a womanish voice, with what I recognised as an Andean inflexion, said excitedly, "Yes, yes, the anniversary!"

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The Governor beamed. "But of course—you have an excellent memory, my old friend. Now let me present you to my new friend Professor Van Thiel, who has been most anxious to meet you. The Professor wants to put you in the history book he's writing—he's going to make you famous for ever."

In some embarrassment I held out my hand. With his eyes still on the Governor, Alguarte negligently shook my fingers.

"Famous, yes!" he said, giggling complacently.

Studying his pale and watery eyes, I did not doubt that José Alguarte was far from sane, and the Governor's belief that he had been an imbecile from birth seemed at least plausible. That conclusion relieved my moral discomfort: however distasteful this occasion, there was no need, I thought, to squander pity on a creature so obviously incapable of ordinary human feelings.

To Alguarte was given the place of honour on the Governor's right. I sat facing him, and opposite the Governor sat the Commandant, while the two morose soldiers stood together, a yard from Alguarte's back, with their rifles at the port position, their thumbs close to the safety-catches.

Gastronomically, it was an admirable meal, with several courses of diced or shredded vegetables, copiously sauced and artfully spiced, leading to an elaborate dish in the local tradition which somewhat resembled *iscas a Portugueza.* The local port-coloured wine, in generous supply, was excellent of its kind. No fewer than four negro servants were employed in seeing that no-one's plate or glass was for a moment empty. And never, as far as I remember, did such luxurious entertainment afford me so little delight.

"Attention, Alguarte!" the Commandant barked at intervals. "Answer when the Governor speaks to you!"

And on each occasion the Governor rebuked him: "No, Herculano, leave him alone! José and I, we understand each other."

He need not have troubled: it was evident that Alguarte was no more sensitive to Herculano's voice than are children in the slums of Salvador to their mothers' incessant scolding.

"Yes, José, the Professor is greatly interested in your historic act," the Governor said, smiling paternally, as the meal progressed. "A remarkable act it was indeed. Of course, we must all regret that it meant the loss to the State of General Lugones. But from the point of view of planning—of boldness in execution—"

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"Lugones?" Like a dart fired from an air-pistol the name seemed to penetrate the cloak of apathy in which Alguarte had been wrapped. But almost at once his look of alert suspicion gave place to a vapid smile. "That was the tyrant," he muttered, and he began repeating in a childish sing-song, "Tyrant Lugones, Tyrant Lugones . . ."

"Enough of that!" the Commandant interposed.

"Well, for the moment let's accept your point of view," the Governor said equably, nodding to Alguarte as if both were entirely reasonable men. "What seems to me so strange, if Lugones was a hard man, is that no-one helped you in getting rid of him. All that planning you had to do, collecting the apparatus, transporting it all the way to the Matzina defile—I'd have thought that among all the men who hated Lugones you could have picked a few to lend a hand."

Alguarte said nothing. In a spinsterish way he was prodding at the food on his plate, separating morsels of red pepper and finically bearing them to his mouth, one at a time. From his fixed and foolish smile I inferred that his thoughts, if any, no longer had any connection with what the Governor was saying.

Undaunted, the Governor leaned over the table, bringing his eyes and voice to bear with greater intensity on his peculiar guest. "I've always thought it a pity," he said softly, "that those others had to die as well—the General's entourage, four of them, the driver of the locomotive, and two or three more. Men with families, most of them. Have you ever thought of them at all?"

No answer.

"I mean, if I myself had been responsible for all those deaths I'd be looking out for someone to share the responsibility. I'd expect my friends—people who thought the same way as me—to come around and give me some support. Not just to leave me in jail, year after year, all alone."

Still no answer: nothing to show that the Governor's words, slowly and carefully articulated, had any meaning for the man they were addressed to. I had the impression, just then, that I was attending an elaborate ritual which could lead to no conceivable result.

But a little later that view was slightly modified. We had reached dessert, and the Governor's voice had grown lazy, as if, besieged by the dual force of wine and sunlight, he were already half asleep. Quite casually—or so I thought at the time—he remarked, "Well, José, I've been thinking: you've

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been in jail for long enough. It seems to me we might just as well send you home now. I mean, after one or two small formalities."

That brought from Alguarte a movement of the head so small that I may only have imagined it. But his lips did move; and though it was barely audible I distinctly saw them framing a single word: "Formalities?"

Had the Governor caught that utterance too? He was looking another way, over the Commandant's shoulder, and when he spoke again it appeared that he had forgotten the topic of Alguarte's release.

"I meant to tell you," he said idly, sipping at a tall glass of coffee, "I had the privilege of speaking to Señora Alguarte the other day. Your Luisa, I mean. It has taken my staff all this time to find out where she's living—as soon as we knew that, I asked her to come and see me. I must confess, it surprised me to find your wife so young—what, twenty, twenty-five years younger than you are? And once, before her illness, so beautiful—that one can still see."

It needed no great intelligence to see how the Governor's tactics were developing, and now I was more than ever thankful for Alguarte's insensibility. Once more he seemed impervious to the Governor's observations. As he primly stirred his coffee he turned his eyes to left and right, always slightly avoiding the three faces which were turned towards his; again he was smiling over some private rumination, so that I saw him then as a little old gentleman of the nineties, already for some years senile, surrounded by foreigners who spoke in a language he did not know.

But now there was a further change in his behaviour. His wandering eyes came to rest on the Governor's forehead, with a look of curiosity, as if the Governor had only just arrived there, dropping from the skies. And he said abruptly, "The driver? You tell me the locomotive driver was killed too?"

It was the Commandant who popped out the answer: "Well, of course, fool!"

As far as I could see, the Governor accepted the backward turn of the conversation without a tremor of surprise. He said evenly, "Yes, naturally the loco went off the line, and the driver died from scalding."

"Not natural at all!" Alguarte retorted. "A mistake entirely! Second coach—Lugones was in the second coach. That vulture, with all his hangers-on. That was the one we blew."

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"'We'?" the Governor echoed.

"The timing was absolutely right!" the old man persisted, now sweating with excitement. "I had the stop-watch, we'd tested all the fuses. It worked perfectly—I challenge you to deny it. Second coach—blown to smithereens."

"Yes," the Commandant said drily, "and it just so happened the loco went off the track at the same time!"

"Who do you say tested the fuses?" the Governor asked.

"I tell you there was nothing wrong with the fuses," Alguarte rejoined. "I tell you the timing was perfection—I got the second coach."

It was an angry little man who said those words, beating the table, glaring alternately at the Governor and the Commandant and then, for good measure, at me. But so frail a creature could not persist in such titanic rage: once more his mood abruptly changed.

"An excellent repast!" he said inconsequently, swallowing the rest of his coffee, energetically wiping his mouth with a big red handkerchief. "The best I've had for a long time. I must thank you, señor—for the moment I forget your name—I must thank you most sincerely. You and I, señor, we have our differences. Lugones—a friend of yours, I think you once told me. In truth a monster, if you want to know—but one can't expect everyone to have a grasp of politics like mine. I thank you, none the less, for your gracious hospitality, which I hope very soon to return."

"Soon?" the Governor repeated.

"On my little farm," Alguarte explained, staring with screwed eyes into space as if he could just catch sight of it. "I have a farm, you know—a modest affair, but quite productive in a good year. Fruit and maize. Hogs, as a rule. Some cotton, a little tobacco."

"Very nice, José. It sounds a charming property."

"At any rate you'll get a decent meal. Yes, señor—I'm afraid I forget your name—we'll have a good time, you and I, when I'm back on my farm." In fresh excitement, he broke into quavering laughter. Still laughing, he darted a contemptuous glance at the Commandant and made the motion of spitting on the ground. "You and I, señor—not that bastard. He can stay here, he can hang himself any time he likes."

"And when is it to be," the Governor asked pleasantly, "this meal to which you're kindly inviting me?"

"When?" The laughter in Alguarte's face went out like a match-flame, giving place to a pale confusion. "Soon, I think

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—quite soon. I was told . . . I understood . . . I think it was you, señor, who said just now I should return quite shortly to my farm."

The Governor in his turn appeared to be perplexed. "Indeed—did I say that? Well, I suppose it could be arranged, if that is what you wish. You feel quite capable of managing your farm again?"

A sound from Alguarte's lips may have been meant for "Yes"—it was scarcely audible. His attention seemed to have slackened once more; his eyes, like the beam of a searching torch, were wandering everywhere except towards the Governor's face.

"I mean," the Governor said, his tone still rational and friendly, "it's rather a question whether you could look after your wife as well. She's a sick woman, you know—she's never been well since your son's death. What—didn't you hear? Ah, the letter from my office must have gone astray. Your son died more than a year ago." He paused to relight his cigar. "So your wife has to run the farm by herself now. That's hard for her, with her illness. It's a state of affairs that can't last long."

Once again my own feelings were protected by Alguarte's alienation. His eyes had come to rest on the table; he was dribbling, and though there were tears on his cheeks his mouth was spread in a fresh, exuberant smile, a grin of total vacancy.

"Yes," the Governor pursued, "for your Luisa's sake I think you'd best be getting home as soon as possible." And now he turned to the Commandant. "I want you, Herculano, to make all the arrangements as quickly as you can. Our friend may need fresh clothes, and any property he has here wants to be carefully packed. Then transport—you'll attend to all that as well. I want Alguarte to be on his way home within one hour of his filling out the necessary form."

Without moving my head I could read the few words typed on the paper which, as casually as a ticket-clerk, the Governor dropped on the table where Alguarte's plate had been:

The following assisted me in the action against General Lugones

there were lines of dots numbered 1 to 6, and a further line with the word *Signed* on the left and Alguarte's full name in capitals beneath.

"You see, I've lowered my terms," the Governor said agreeably, as if this were a game they both enjoyed. "Six names, that's all I want now."

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And he slipped a pencil into Alguarte's hand.

For a few moments Alguarte paid no attention: I should have said that he was no longer even aware of his surroundings. Then, watching closely, I saw a movement of his eyes which told me that covertly, suspiciously, he was trying to read the typewritten words. There followed another and longer interval in which I could not even guess whether his chaotic mind was working at all. And it came as a surprise when he spoke.

"Please—you must forgive me, being so slow," he said indistinctly. "It's difficult—you understand—it's difficult for me. I've been through a hard time, I'm not clear any more what's happening, my memory's all gone."

But his fingers, as he said those words, seemed to grow sensitive to the pencil stuck between them. He was still staring at the paper, and now, showing extreme reluctance, he began to write. His left arm, lying across the top of the paper, obstructed my view, but I could see that he wrote uncertainly, like a young child or a man with a strained wrist. Once he paused to cross himself, as if that were an integral part of his task. The whole laborious operation must have taken three or four minutes; and then, with a gesture of impatience, he pushed the paper towards the Governor and rose to his feet.

"So—done!" he said.

He made a small, military movement with both his hands, beckoning the two soldiers who, as if this were a daily routine, stepped instantly to his sides. "Back now!" he ordered; and as the three men wheeled to return the way they had come I had a momentary impression that he and no-one else was in command.

Taken, I think, by surprise, the Governor had left the paper on the table. Obliquely, I could read now the large and sprawling sentence: *For murdering innocents with Lugones I look to mercy of Almighty God.* And below, in giant capitals: J. ALGUARTE DOES NOT BETRAY FRIENDS.

I turned to stare again at the retreating trio. Ridiculously small, Alguarte appeared, between the two husky soldiers, and his stiff, bow-legged walk (such as belongs often to the insane) made him look as if he were bestriding a sheep. Yet what remains most vivid in my memory is the curious impression of completeness, of inflexible independence, which came perhaps from the set of his shoulders, the erect and rigid carriage of the small white head.

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WILLIAM SAROYAN

Accident at the County Fair

The roar of the crowd suddenly became crazy ... like a great scream

ONE day Israel Bashmanian went to the County Fair in Fresno because all of his grapes had been picked, the season was over, it was the fall of the year now, and he might as well go with the rest of the people to the Opening Day and see the man jump out of the airplane and come down safely by parachute. Israel, or Isro as he was called, had plenty of hard money in his pocket and he planned to spend the better part of it on hamburger sandwiches, hot dogs, soda pop, spun candy, icecream, and all of the other good things that people generally don't believe a man of sixty-six can enjoy.

One of his boys drove him the five miles from the vineyard to the fairground, and Isro told the boy not to bother about picking him up and taking him home as he planned to stay a long time, perhaps until closing time, around midnight.

"Have you got enough money?"

"Three dollars and eighty-seven cents."

"Won't you feel out of place, alone?"

"I'm sure I'll run into somebody in the family."

"It's not even two o'clock yet. I'd better come back at four, in case you decide you want to go home, after all."

"No, I want to see everything. Never mind me, you've got work to do and a wife and kids to think about. Must I pay fifty cents to go in?"

"There's an Exhibitor's Gate, just over there. But really, Father, won't it make you uncomfortable to tell a lie just to save fifty cents?"

"I won't be telling a lie. I *am* an Exhibitor. Why should I throw away fifty cents? Raisins this year are three cents a

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pound. Paying fifty cents to go in would be like throwing away sixteen or seventeen pounds of raisins. I can't afford to do that. How much are hamburgers?"

"Ten cents."

"With the money I save I can eat all afternoon."

"All right, Father. I won't come back at four, then."

Isro's youngest son drove off in the Ford pick-up, and the old man went to the Exhibitor's Gate, holding a magnificent pomegranate in his extended left hand, as if to be studying it on his way to his Exhibit.

There were two men at the gate, Americans, each of them wearing a white badge on his coat with the word *Official* on it.

I will nod to them and go about my business, the farmer thought, and sure enough that's all there was to it. The men nodded back, noticed the pomegranate, and Isro walked on in, saying to himself, "There's fifty cents saved right there."

It was a grand afternoon, bright but not hot, the air sharp and good. From far away he heard the music of a merry-go-round, and then the louder music of a calliope and, although Isro didn't know it, the music from the merry-go-round had been *Redwing*, and the music of the calliope had been *Pony Boy*.

All he knew was that the music was good to hear—a little sombre, but all the better for a man who had lived as much as he had and was now sixty-six, in fine clothing, at ease with the world, at the County Fair, with three dollars and eighty-seven cents to spend, and already the price of admission saved. When he came to where the hamburgers were being fried, he breathed in the beautiful aroma of onions and sizzling ground meat, and stopped to watch the way the man did his work, an activity he had always enjoyed watching. Perhaps he might go so far as to pay ten cents and have one right now, but he decided against it—later. The smell itself almost satisfied his hunger.

Suddenly everybody looked up, so Isro looked up too, and there he saw the airplane.

"It's two o'clock," a small boy shouted to his sister. "He's going to jump now. Let's go into the infield where he's going to come down."

The girl ran to her brother, and a whole migration to the infield began to take place. Admission there was obviously free, so Isro joined the migration and was soon in a great crowd of people, all of them looking up, waiting for the man

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to jump. A voice came over the loudspeaker saying that Daredevil Dan Davey was about to jump out of the airplane, and he was expected to come down somewhere in the infield. The speaker asked the people to please not crowd the man after he had landed. Boys and girls and men and women crowded around Isro, all of them moving along as if there were a better place from which to look up at the airplane.

Well, this would certainly be an interesting thing to see. Imagine a man being willing to jump out of an airplane. He was looking up when a roar from the crowd informed him that the man had jumped, but he hadn't seen the man do so, his eyesight wasn't that good. As soon as the parachute opened, however, he would surely be able to see both the parachute and the man himself. The roar of the crowd, however, not only didn't stop, it became louder, and then suddenly it went crazy, like a great scream, and for the first time he saw a speck in the sky which he knew was the man. The speck was coming down very swiftly, but *without* the parachute.

It's part of the act, Isro thought, to give the people a thrill, to make the little boys and girls and their papas and mamas scream. Now, though, he could clearly make out the figure of a man coming straight down, and he noticed that the arms of the man were snatching at a rope.

"He can't get the thing to open," a boy shouted.

"He'd better make it fast," another boy shouted.

People were bumping into Isro from all sides, and now he heard a woman and a small girl crying. And then it was too late, everybody knew it was too late, although the man hadn't yet fallen all the way. And then he had, but not in the infield—beyond it, in a vineyard.

Poor man, Isro thought, and he turned away to go back to the hamburger stand, because now he was ready to spend a dime, and an extra nickel for a cup of coffee too, because the accident and the roaring of the crowd had made him suddenly very hungry, and just a little tense too, as all accidents make anybody who witnesses them.

When he reached into his pocket, however, it was empty. He had surely moved the coins to another pocket, but he found all of his pockets empty. There wasn't a coin in any of them. And there wasn't a hole in any of them, either. A pickpocket had taken all three dollars and eighty-seven cents of his money.

All he had now was the pomegranate. The fact is, had he not been holding the pomegranate in his left hand that hand

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would have been kept in the left pocket of his trousers where his coins had been, and the pickpocket would not have been able to steal his money.

This was terribly discouraging. He went to where the Exhibits were, hoping to find a member of the family, but he found nobody he knew well enough to speak to about what had happened, and then at last while he was standing and staring at a display of walnuts, almonds, raisins, pomegranates, olives, dried figs and bottles of wine, all from Kingsburg, his cousin, Hamazasp Bashmanian, whom he had known all his life, beginning in Bitlis, appeared on the other side of the Exhibit, looking very angry about something; but then Hamazasp had always been an angry man, even in boyhood.

Isro went to the slightly older man who said, "Isro, from the rusty expression on your face I know something terrible has happened to you. What is it?"

I won't tell him, Isro thought. It's too embarrassing. Why should I let my own cousin know I have been a fool?

"I saw the poor man fall to his tragic death," Isro said.

"I also saw him do that, standing in the great crowd in the infield, people all around me, up against me, shouting and crying and pushing. It was a very exciting but unfortunate time for everybody, but most of all for me."

"Most of all for *you*?" Isro said. "Why?"

"I believe you know why, because from that moss-green expression on your face I would be willing to make a wager that the same thing happened to you. Confess, Isro, it's good for the soul."

"What shall I confess?"

"After the accident, you put your hand in your pocket expecting to find your money, but you didn't find it, did you?"

"Hamazasp, believe me, that is *exactly* what happened. How did you know?"

"I saw it in your face. How much did the pickpocket take?"

"Three dollars and eighty-seven cents."

"Perhaps one dollar and *forty-five* cents?"

"No, I swear I came here an hour ago with three dollars and eighty-seven cents in my pocket, and now it is all gone."

"You came to the County Fair with three dollars and eighty-seven cents? What in the world for?"

"I have always wanted to spend a whole day buying and eating hamburgers and hot dogs, and so at last this was to have been the day. Soda pop, icecream, candy, chewing

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gum. I was even planning to ride a lion on the merry-go-round. Well, I was a fool to want such things, to be willing to pay good money for them, and a bigger fool to have my pocket picked, but thank God I found you, my own cousin, so that I may borrow fifteen cents for one hamburger and a bottle of soda pop, at least."

"My pocket was picked also," Hamazasp said. "Four dollars and sixty-five cents, and now I haven't got a penny either. I am just as hungry as you are, just as ashamed."

"What shall we do?" Isro said. "I told my youngest boy, who brought me here, not to come back, because I might stay until closing time at midnight."

"And I was brought by *my* youngest, who expects me to stay a long time too, and to *make* my way home."

"Shall we start walking home, then?"

"Are you willing to have your family know you are a fool? I'm not. I must stay, Isro."

"How long?"

"Certainly until after eight."

"We can't stay here six more hours without anything to eat or drink, can we?"

"We have no choice. We certainly can't pick somebody else's pocket. We've got to pretend we came out here for a pleasant holiday of happy money-spending, and that we did in fact have a pleasant holiday of happy money-spending."

"Well, I have this pomegranate. We can share that."

"And we must see everything to be seen, so that we will be able to say honestly what we saw. We had better begin immediately while we still have strength enough to move."

The two old men shared the pomegranate, and their tobacco, and they drank a lot of water, which, of course, is always free, and they saw everything at the Fair to which admission was without cost.

At eight they began to walk slowly home, where they were greeted by Isro's daughter who served them a good dinner of stuffed bellpeppers, cucumbers, tomatoes, and squash, and then drove Hamazasp to his vineyard near Malaga.

Home again, the daughter said to Isro, "The accident at the fairground was simply awful. And so useless, so unnecessary; so sad, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it was," the old man said, and thought, You'll never know how awful it was, how useless and unnecessary, how sad, how embarrassing and painful.

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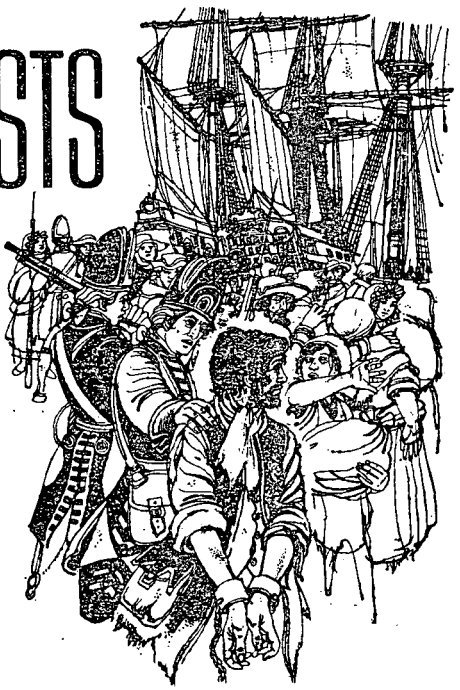
THE COLONISTS



by
RUPENE
RUAPAPERE

THERE would have been little or no chance of getting volunteers. But that didn't worry them. They had a brilliant idea. They emptied the prisons. They took criminals, men and women—for breeding purposes, naturally—the very dregs of society, they said. Grimshaw was one. He had killed his wife and the man beside her in his bed. His powerful spirit cried for the injustice and the fear in him.

Of course there were outcries against the scheme. The greatest orator on the opposition side shouted at the government: Where is the justice, when persons who have by law been spared from death should, after a mock display of mercy, be compelled to undergo it by being sent to a place where they could not live and where the manner of death might be singularly horrid. The gallows would rid them of their lives in a far less dreadful manner than would the climate or the indigenes.

The well-fed minister on the government side showed a

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detailed plan. It was perfectly and callously precise to the last syllable. What are we losing? he said. Our loss is our gain, and we can gain more by that loss. These scoundrels have never been put to better use in the service of their country. The fact that this place is so remote is in our favour. Even if we fail we get rid of them for ever.

It is a shameful and unblessed thing, said the orator, to take the scum of people and wicked condemned men to be the people with whom you plant.

Rivers of words—argument, discussion, protest, demand—the preliminary ritual to inevitable certainty, the composition of the event. Flesh and blood in chains had no chance of winning. Their wills, in suppression, were useless to them. The crusaders and champions of their cause spoke well and acted ably, but knowing themselves beaten turned to other affairs of state. Orders-in-council made the decision legal, and final.

They organised the horde.

When they came for Grimshaw he was a block of stone in his cell. He had been listening to the cries and obscenities of the others as they were taken away. None seemed to know where they were going, or why; all they had was a vague knowledge that it was another world. Grimshaw knew.

"On your feet."

He looked up. Both were young men with vicious faces; full of mechanical efficiency.

"Leave me," he said. "I'll make it worth your while, boys. Some day I'll make it good for you."

"Damn you, get up," the bigger one said, prodding him. And prodding him again.

Grimshaw's body swelled; his eyes glared with hate.

"Why, you mongrel curs, I'll see you dead first."

He shouted the words. They saw the violence in him. It arrested for a moment the routine mechanics of their movements. They looked warily at him, weapons ready. The tight-lipped one said, "Don't give us trouble and you won't get trouble."

"How'd you like it to be you?" Grimshaw said, not taking his eyes off them.

"We didn't murder, or it might have been."

"Murder, you call it! Killing two rats that eat the guts out of your life." He stood up. "I know now it was a mistake, though; they weren't worth it. But you'd have done the same . . . in my shoes. Any man would have."

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The bigger one nodded, grinning a little, like a crack in a rock. "We'd have seen to it that we didn't get caught. That was your mistake, not the other."

"This gabble's getting us nowhere," the tight-lipped one said impatiently. "On your way."

"Make me," Grimshaw said.

"Don't blame us," the bigger one said. "We're just doing our job."

"Do it then."

They grabbed his arms, back to the method again. They flung him forward. He felt the tension explode in him. He swung against them, striking out, left and right. They went sprawling away, but turned quickly in rage ready to kill him. They stayed their impulse as of one mind, for they saw that that was what he wanted. He was flat upright against the wall, his arms out, crucified, his head back and his beating throat bared, his eyes full of a ghastly hope.

"Get on with it," he said. "What's stopping you?"

They called. Two others joined them and all four moved carefully over to Grimshaw, a prickly glee in their eyes. "Nothing so sweet, you bastard," the big one said. "You'll die all right. But not here."

They beat him. They did not kill him.

His head was still throbbing, his whole body aching, hours later when he stood with the rest. They were standing by to board the ship. He looked desperately around him. He thought of making a run for it, but even had it been possible to run he knew they would only catch and embark him. They would not kill him. Bodies jostled him. Faces pushed into his. He felt his jaw. There was a scar of dried blood that started at the temple. He looked with despair and despair looked back. Everywhere it looked back.

Dizzily he turned about, his hands cold as ice, his mouth dry with fear. He saw a young woman gazing at him, still with terror, like a breathing statue. They stared at each other, eyes answering eyes in a compassionate supplication of pity and need. She pushed towards him. She wet a corner of her handkerchief in her mouth and tenderly wiped the blood from his face. He let her do it, touched by the human touch, long-lost. He saw beauty in her face behind the exhaustion and suffering, the daze of dread. "Don't worry," he found himself saying. "It won't be so bad."

The words brought a flicker of hope into her eyes; like a child, he thought.

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"What's your name?"

He told her.

"Mine's Anne White . . . Anne White," she said, as if she wanted him to know and remember.

She put her hand on his softly like a cold and trembling bird.

"Do you know what's going to happen to us? Where we're going?" He shrugged, thinking it best. "Nobody's been there before, have they?"

"The pathfinders, the explorers—"

"No, I mean to live."

He shook his head. "We'll be the first."

She looked away unseeingly, just muttering the words as if to herself. "They say the heat there is like a fire . . . the dust blows all the time . . . it never rains." She turned back to him, uncomprehendingly, shaking her head. "How are we . . . how can anyone live in a place like that?"

His impulse was to snap out the words, driven by his own anguish, but he controlled himself and uttered them calmly and soothingly to reassure her, "Don't believe everything you hear."

Again the hope came in her eyes.

"You do think it'll be all right then?" she entreated.

"Don't worry," he said. He could think of nothing else. But he felt guilty. It was like feeding poisoned syrup to a trusting child.

There were shouts and a tidal heave in the crowd, and they were separated; but he caught a glimpse of her face bobbing away, over shoulders, by heads, like an apple dropped in the reeds.

Under guard, he moved with the others towards the ship, shuffling and stumbling in the swaying line. And quickly, before it was gone, he took a last full look around him at the country he was born in. He knew deep inside he would never see it again. Then he turned and went down the narrow ladder into the quarters reserved for them. Men were crammed in there, sorting themselves out. The ventilators were quiescent, and the air was foul, the stench of human flesh high. In the confusion of men lost, and himself lost like them, Grimshaw saw that the confined space, lighted as yet only by the open hatchways, was fitted with rows of suspended bunks which were swinging less than eighteen inches apart.

A man crashed into him, screaming so near as to burst his

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eardrums: "They don't give a curse for us, none of us! Just stinking cattle, that's all we are!"

Sobbing in the agony of his rage and terror, he flung his arms wildly about as he tried to charge towards the ladder. A man with a brutal face turned, blaspheming, smashed a fist to his chin and tried to kick at his head as he dropped. Grimshaw's arm went out like a ramrod. He grabbed the brute's throat and squeezed the flesh like a dishrag; and the man clutched the throttling hand and fought to struggle away from the killer glare in Grimshaw's eyes. A guard shouted, again and again. Men tore them apart. Grimshaw was panting, his mouth open, his thick chest rising and falling.

The brutal face twisted, the voice snorting hoarsely, "Why don't he take it like a man! We're all in it."

"When were you a man?" Grimshaw said, contemptuously. "You gutter slime! You've got no more intelligence or feelings than a post. Don't matter to you till it happens—at the other end. But we're human. We know what we're in for, and we care."

He lifted up the fallen man and placed him gently in one of the bunks. He tossed himself into the one alongside. Others were struggling into theirs—men packed like bees in a hive, dragging for breath in the suffocating atmosphere. Some were lying quiet with big eyes stonily staring. Others had their hands to their faces in prayer or grief. Some, like monuments, sat up hugging their knees, snivelling in misery and talking to themselves: others, in the same position, but slumped and lolling like rag dolls, wept, utterly broken down by shock and despair. The low-natured, the callously indifferent, made jokes or smouldered quietly in conspiracies of hate and revenge. One man sang hymns.

The man next to Grimshaw stirred. He opened his eyes. His face was grey and drawn; he looked frail and old, but he was no more than forty. He clawed at Grimshaw's arm.

"It's the mystery of it . . . this voyage . . . the mystery. Why don't they tell us?"

Grimshaw didn't answer.

"They just came and took me. All of us. Not a word." He raised himself up and looked desperately at Grimshaw. "But my mate, he said he heard it was another world—away to hell. Like nothing we've known. That right?"

"It's right," Grimshaw said shortly, feeling the tension rising in him again.

"Who are they to do this to us? Where will it end? My

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God, I never thought it possible for a man to be any worse off than what he was."

"You don't know yet," Grimshaw snapped, clenching his fists.

"Who feeds us when the food gives out? How do we live?"

"They've got it all worked out."

"Harry said he heard it's going to take us eight months to get there. Eight months! Where, in God's name, is this place to take so long? Where?"

"What's the difference now?" Grimshaw said irritably, feeling his own emotion choking him. "Shut up and get some sleep. There's no escape."

He looked about him and the man alongside did the same. The ceiling was seven or eight feet from the floor. Between decks were thick bulkheads with loopholes for the guards to fire through in the event of mutiny. They had thought of everything.

The frail man breathed hard. "They're not going to keep us cooped up like this all the way, are they?"

"What else?"

"Won't there be stopping places?"

"Bound to be," Grimshaw said. "But who knows what they'll mean to us?"

"Then they'll have to let us out for a spell, surely to God they will, if they don't want us to die."

"Well, they don't want that . . . if they can help it." Grimshaw looked at his companion sunken in desolation. "You might be right," he said, with pity. "I hope you are."

But he knew there was no chance. They wouldn't take the risk. The cargo was too dangerous.

"Ah, God," the frail man said hopelessly. "What's life all about? What's it all about, eh?"

"I know what it's not about," Grimshaw said. "It's not just breathing. I know that. It's not meant to be lived in a cage, or spent in chains."

"I did no great wrong to land me here, nothing to deserve this, though it was a wrong."

"Sometimes a man can't help himself. Whether he should or he shouldn't have has nothing to do with it."

"What'd you do for a living?"

"I was a farmer," Grimshaw said. "You?"

"A toymaker," the frail man said. "Good toys I made." He lay back quietly. "Beautiful toys. I won't ever do that again."

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Grimshaw's eyes roved over all the men in that prison, and he wondered what they had been and what they had done, what they were leaving behind. There were two hundred and thirty of them: and there were five more ships, just like this, with others aboard. Ships and men and women, all the same. One of the women was Anne White, frightened, lost somewhere in all that darkness and woe.

The time came. The hatches were locked in place. Men braced themselves, all hope gone; in the blackness they breathed and snuffled like animals... waiting... waiting. There was the first stridulant movement. Somewhere outside the signal had been given. The lead ship first of the squadron, full of officials and crew. Next the tender. The three supply ships after that. Then the six transports with their banished freight.

Grimshaw felt the riding lift of all those tons, the plunge and rock of the craft fighting resistance, the plashing noise from beside and below as it moved off into the immense unknown.

And now that it was a fact, the first step in being cut off from civilisation, the tension eased in him and he began to think of survival, even with some kind of relief. Maybe it would end up to be the beginning of a fresh start. It could be worse. It could be that a man was to be set down in solitary on a forsaken waste, without food, without shelter, remote from help. Instead, he was to be islanded with all these others, all together, though in nowhere.

And one thing, if accounts were true, the commodore of the fleet was a kind and humane man: one who believed in his mission and had the faith to carry it out successfully, even if no-one else had. There seemed reason to believe this man would hear him and help him; because he knew, Grimshaw, that he had something to give, and at twenty-six he still had the best part of his life left in which to give it. Perhaps there was land to farm in the new world and he would farm it.

But was he only just telling himself these things, as a mind in the deception of a dream? Was he merely a victim of the resilient power of the human spirit that everlastingly aspired to hope and happiness? He didn't know, he couldn't be sure, and conjecture was only a torment. All that he could be sure of, in fact, was that this was the morning of May 13, 1787, and he was headed for Botany Bay.

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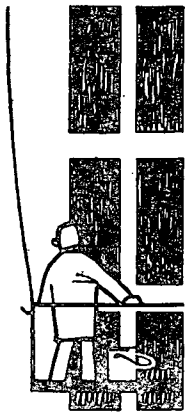
GIRL WHO STOPPED A WAR

by Lionel Davidson



EVERY weekday morning at ten-thirty exactly, Major Henry Chandler lit his pipe, took a folded copy of *The Times* out of his drawer and began working on the crossword. It was sacrosanct, this half hour between ten-thirty and eleven. The camp was well-run. He had given strict orders not to be disturbed. He never was disturbed.

What then was his surprise when, at a few minutes after half-past ten on a fine day in May, there was a tap on his door and his adjutant came in. This was a young man called Lieutenant Richard Bitters; a sound enough young chap, the major would have thought, and one who knew his little ways.

"What is it, Dickie?" he said irritably.

"Sorry to disturb you, sir," the lieutenant said. "I thought you'd like to know O'Keefe has turned up."

"O'Keefe?"

"The fellow who hit Sergeant Dennison and ran off a fortnight ago."

"Ah, picked him up, have they? Good show."

"He wasn't picked up. He gave himself up at the guard-room half an hour ago. To tell you the truth, sir, he's got the queerest story I ever heard in my life. I wondered if you could spare a minute to see him now."

"Now?" The major gazed at him in consternation.

"He says he was hired to kill a man. There appears to be some urgency, sir."

The major stared at him for a moment and put the paper back in his drawer. "Righto," he said. "March him in."

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"The only thing is, sir—there's a girl with him. She's slightly more convincing than he is. I wondered if you wouldn't mind—that is, it might be less trouble all round if you'd step over to the guardroom. This girl actually brought him back," he said earnestly, as though throwing extra light on the situation.

The major did not like any of this. He did not like being interrupted, or leaving his crossword uncompleted, or stepping out of his office to interview an absconding private soldier. Above all, he did not like girls in the guardroom. Some premonitory nerve vibrated in his body; complications and irritations lay ahead today. He stood up and reached for his cap.

Private O'Keefe, in flannels and sports jacket, sat upright on a small guardroom chair. He was a large, raw young man with hot, angry eyes. His face, the major thought, looked dangerous and incomplete.

The girl, in contrast, was the most delicate and *finished* little thing the major had ever seen. He looked at her twice quite sharply. Her black hair was cut short; it sat beautifully and elegantly above her rather stunning little face. She was wearing a red coat that suited her wonderfully.

Major Chandler was a bachelor and it had long been a preoccupation of his to wonder why all the really remarkable-looking girls went for fellows with faces like O'Keefe. He felt himself becoming annoyed and aggrieved, and he said gruffly, "Now then, O'Keefe, what's all this?"

It was indeed, as Lieutenant Bitters had said, a queer story. It seemed that after O'Keefe had hit the sergeant, outside a public house, he had made his way briskly to the station and taken the next train to London.

He had done this while not exactly sober, but once he was in London he realised he had burnt his boats. He stood to pick up, at the very least, ninety days, and the prospect didn't attract him. He had eight pounds on him, and he knew he dare not go home, for the military police would be looking for him.

He knocked about in pubs and cafés for a few days wondering what he should do, when by chance he met a man called "Spider" Webb who had deserted from the unit over four months previously. As it happened, both men were painters and decorators in civilian life, and O'Keefe asked if he could get him a job.

The man Webb was very ill at ease, and he blurted out

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that he had himself just taken a job he didn't want. The job had come through the proprietor of a café behind King's Cross station, and he had only taken it on to oblige the fellow, who had helped him before. There would be a good commission for the proprietor.

"What is it?" O'Keefe asked.

"Well," Webb said, "it's a bit flipping queer. They want a bloke used to working from a painter's cradle on high buildings." It seemed the man had to be able to "take care of himself," and the pay was five hundred pounds for one week's work.

"Five hundred nicker!" O'Keefe said. "What's the catch?"

Webb didn't know that. He was supposed to get details that afternoon from a man he had to meet at a certain spot in Battersea Park. He plainly did not want to go, and O'Keefe, who was by now in desperate straits and beginning to think of himself as something of a desperado, said he would take on the job himself. Webb was greatly relieved and gave him full directions.

"There's only one thing, though," he said. "These fellows don't like being messed around. They were told I was going to do it, so you'd better make out you're me."

O'Keefe went to Battersea Park and introduced himself as Webb to the man he had to meet. This was an elderly, well-spoken fellow, who questioned him closely about his work and his army life. He had then, to O'Keefe's surprise, asked him to accompany him to the funfair. There, in a shooting booth, he had watched with satisfaction as O'Keefe fired off fifty rounds. O'Keefe was a very good natural shot.

They had then gone to a house in the Fulham Road where, in the backyard, a painter's cradle was suspended from the roof. The man told O'Keefe to raise himself in it to the second floor, memorise everything he saw in the room, and descend again in the shortest possible time.

He timed O'Keefe on a stopwatch, and apparently the time and O'Keefe's account of what he had seen were satisfactory for the man pulled out his wallet and gave O'Keefe ten pounds.

"Now then," he said, "I understand you are an absentee from the army. You have nothing to fear from us. The job you have to do is a simple one and well within your capabilities. You have to go up in a cradle and shoot a man through a window. He is an enemy of your country, so you

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need have no scruples. In wartime you wouldn't think twice about it. Come round here again tomorrow morning."

O'Keefe didn't know quite what to make of this. He had no intention of shooting anyone through a window, but the money was a godsend and, if he played his cards properly, there seemed to be a chance of getting a great deal more of it. He thought the old man was mad.

He went back the next day and spent the morning going up and down in the cradle taking pot-shots at a cardboard dummy with a big, silenced Luger the old man handed him. In the afternoon he was introduced to a "partner," another deserter he supposed. This man was to drive the van.

In the evening two or three other men arrived, and O'Keefe was told where the shooting was to take place. This was when O'Keefe began to get frightened. The place of the shooting was the Ministry of Defence.

One of the men produced two photographs from a briefcase. One was of the Ministry: a window on the third floor was marked with a cross. The other was of the man O'Keefe had to shoot. It was a large, glossy press photograph, and there was something familiar about the face although he could not identify it.

The job had to be done at 3.35 p.m. precisely on the following Monday.

At this point in O'Keefe's story, which had been somewhat confused and meandering and only kept coherent at all by the girl's frequent comments, Major Chandler interrupted.

"Which Monday is that?"

"That would be today, sir."

Major Chandler looked at his watch. It was a quarter to eleven. "Carry on," he said.

All this had happened on the Friday evening, and O'Keefe had grown seriously alarmed. He no longer thought the old man was mad. He realised he was dealing with extremely dangerous people. He thought he had better try and get more money while he could, and asked for it. The old man refused.

"You won't be spending much for the time being," he said. "You'll be reporting here on Saturday, Sunday and Monday. And as a precaution for all of us," he added smiling, "I think we'd better have your lodgings watched. We certainly don't want anything to happen to you."

O'Keefe left the house that evening in something of a panic. He didn't know what he could do. He had no wish to go to

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the police; he could hardly bear to think what they would say to this cock-and-bull story. Besides, no crime had yet been committed. And he thought of himself as a deserter. He was scared out of his wits.

He decided to cut loose; and the only place of safety he could think of was his girlfriend's home at Walthamstow. The girl's name was apparently Polly Francis.

"He hadn't got in touch with me before because he was ashamed of himself," this Miss Polly Francis now intervened.

The girl's family was extremely alarmed at this apparition, and even more alarmed when they heard his story.

He stayed there on Saturday and Sunday. By Sunday night the girl had persuaded him to give himself up. He still refused to go to the police, but he thought his own officers might listen to him if the girl came to back him up. They had caught a train at seven o'clock this morning.

"Um," Major Chandler said in the silence that followed. He looked at Lieutenant Bitters, and then out of the guard-room window to the PT class on the parade ground. "This man you had to—to shoot," he said, turning to the large, raw figure of O'Keefe which dwarfed the small wooden chair. "You say you couldn't recognise him?"

"No, sir."

"Know him again, though?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you remember anything about him? Was he young, old? Civilian?"

O'Keefe's forehead creased. "Hard to say," he said.

"I was thinking," the girl said, "if you had some magazines here or newspapers, something like that, Harry—Mr. O'Keefe—might be able to pick him out."

"Could try the schoolie, sir," Lieutenant Bitters said.

"All right." Major Chandler was still feeling irritated. He half-believed this fantastic rigmarole, but he had a horror of making a fool of himself. He promised himself, as they made their way over to the schoolroom, that if Harry, Mr. O'Keefe, was playing him false, he would spare no small effort to see he got it in the neck.

The schoolmaster had a large drawer full of old press photographs with which he was wont to illustrate his talks on current affairs. They borrowed the pile and sat in his small office going through them. O'Keefe paused over one or two but passed on. There was no hesitation, however, over his choice. "That's him," he said.

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Major Chandler looked, and felt faint. "You're sure?"

"Positive. It's the same photo, too, sir. There's a spot on his nose."

Lieutenant Bitters had been craning his neck to see the photograph. He managed to do so now, and murmured softly, "Oh, my God."

Major Chandler turned the photo over to see if there was some chance that he was mistaken. But his eyes had served him true. The caption said: *Marshal of the Soviet Armed Forces... Order of Suvorov, Order of Lenin, Order of Victory, Virtuti Medal First Class, Gruenwald Star First Class... Minister of Defence of the Soviet Union.*

"Now, look here, Dickie," the major said, after O'Keefe and his young lady had returned to the guardroom, "this is just plain bloody daft. The Soviet Marshal isn't here. How could he be? You couldn't keep a thing like that quiet."

"Barmy," said Lieutenant Bitters. "No other word for it. Still—O'Keefe was pretty sure of it. I mean, what's he stand to gain by spinning such a yarn? It's easy enough to check up."

Major Chandler looked at the telephone. He could see here an opportunity of making a first-class laughing-stock of himself. He had a discreditable inclination to forget all he had heard, place O'Keefe under close arrest and go out for a long walk for the rest of the day.

He picked up the telephone. "Get me Major Higginbotham, War Office," he said. There was silence until the call came through.

"Hello, Higgy. Henry Chandler here. Look, one of the troops has just come across with a silly sort of story. It's something about the Marshal being in London today. Yes, the Soviet Minister of Defence. Potty, isn't it? Still, if you could whistle through to Intelligence..."

The two officers passed the time in desultory and somewhat nervy speculation until the telephone rang again. The major sprang to answer it. It was not however his friend Higginbotham, but a senior officer.

The major had little chance to speak, and when the harsh voice in his ear had ceased, he replaced the receiver very slowly and carefully as if it might break. His face was white and his hands were shaking.

"They're sending a helicopter," he said to his subordinate. "It will be landing on the parade ground in thirty minutes.

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O'Keefe, the girl, yourself and me—everyone that's heard about it—we're all going to the War Office."

"Cripes!" said the lieutenant. "Then it's true."

At the War Office they were shown into a large, airy room where a colonel and two civilians awaited them. Major Chandler had missed his lunch and he was feeling a little sick after the flight. He was feeling sicker still, however, at something he had not had a chance to mention over the telephone, and he said now to the tall, yellow colonel, "There's something I ought to tell you right away, sir. First, these two—" he indicated O'Keefe and the girl, "are unaware of the identity of—of the man in question. Secondly, I wasn't able to tell you that there is a plan to assassinate him at three-thirty this afternoon. It's past two o'clock now, and even though the plan may have been—"

"What the hell are you talking about, Major?" the colonel barked at him.

"The Soviet Minister of . . . the man in question!" Chandler said with a kind of weak ferocity. "O'Keefe here is supposed to shoot him at half-past three." He wondered if it sounded quite as crazy to them as it did in his own ears. He supplied quickly the relevant details. One of the civilians blew his nose hard and wandered out of the room.

"All right," the colonel said, when this man had gone. "Let's have the whole story."

Halfway through the story, which O'Keefe rendered yet again with the girl's assistance, the nose-blower returned and stood quietly in a corner looking over the notes the other civilian had taken.

When O'Keefe had finished, the colonel looked across to this man, who said in a rather gay, interested voice, "This house in Fulham—did you get the impression any of them lived there?"

"I dunno, sir," O'Keefe said. He had masked his awe by working himself into a state of dull fury.

"Any beds upstairs?"

"I never went upstairs."

"Now, buck up, man," the colonel said. "You can see what we're getting at. It won't go any easier with you for being obstinate. Is that where we'd find 'em?"

"Now, how would he know that?" the girl suddenly burst out. Major Chandler, who sat next to her, had noticed her growing somewhat red during this interrogation, and he watched with some admiration as she stood up, walked over

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to the colonel's desk and, leaning over him, continued, "And don't you shout at him as if he were a criminal! I think he's acted very bravely, and if he hadn't decided to come back you wouldn't have known anything about it. So there!"

The colonel's yellow face turned a dirty peach colour, and Major Chandler, chivalrous by nature, hastened to create a diversion.

"I think it's fair to say, sir," he said, "that they have very likely dropped this plan as a result of O'Keefe running away. It would be common sense, if they feared he would spill the beans, to change their headquarters—probably put off this particular plan altogether."

The civilian, who had been smiling at this *contretemps*, now spoke again. "But they know he can't spill the beans," he said pleasantly. "He's dead."

"Dead?" said O'Keefe. "Who's dead?"

The civilian had drawn a midday newspaper from his pocket and now read from it: DESERTER FOUND DROWNED. *The body of a man identified as an army deserter named Alfred John Webb was dragged out of the River Thames at Fulham last night.*

It took O'Keefe a second or two to work out the implications of this, and he then said softly, "Oh, my Gawd! Poor old Spider."

"I have a feeling," the civilian went on in the same light tone, "that whoever did this fell deed did not have the advantage of Private O'Keefe's acquaintance. They will have reported to their employers that the man Webb was now safe, and those cunning fellows will doubtless have rushed an understudy into service."

"You mean," Major Chandler said, "they'll still try to kill the Marshal—at the Ministry this afternoon?"

"Well," the civilian said, looking rather dubiously at his watch, "I think it's time we were popping over there."

At twenty-five past three, Major Chandler and O'Keefe sat in the back seat of a small black car parked near the main entrance to the Ministry of Defence. The two civilians sat in front. The others had remained at the War Office.

The major was now extremely hungry and he was in a bad temper. He had conceived a violent dislike for the civilian in charge; he did not care for his face, or his whimsy, and still less for the man's habit of facetiously evading every question.

"As a matter of interest," he asked now, in a voice choked

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by irritation, "can you tell me if Mr. X is in fact expected here today?"

"Ah, not my cup of tea, that," the man answered promptly.

"Everyone seems to take the story pretty seriously."

"Well, can't have the fellows dressing up as painters and shooting people through a window. Not at the Ministry."

Major Chandler felt himself becoming unbearably exasperated.

"Are we just going to sit here all the afternoon?"

"I thought we might see what happens."

"Because O'Keefe and myself have not had any lunch."

"Do you know," said the civilian in surprise, "nor have I." He glanced at his watch. "But I dare say some of your questions will be answered in a moment, Major."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth before a large black limousine drew up at the main entrance. A man in a black coat and striped trousers ran down the steps and bent inside the car. Five men got out of the car and, without ceremony, followed the man up the steps. All were in civilian dress and the major could only see their backs. The whole incident did not take more than half a minute and the black car drove off.

"Well, I'm damned!" Major Chandler said. "Was that—is it really true, then?"

"As to that—" the civilian began, but he did not finish, for O'Keefe suddenly came to life.

"Here they are," O'Keefe said.

A small grey van came bowling round the corner. It turned in the road and parked facing the way it had come, a few yards before the main entrance. Two men in painters' overalls got out.

"I recognise that one," O'Keefe said. "My partner."

The man indicated had opened the rear doors of the van, removed a coil of rope and was walking up the steps with it. The other man took the cradle out of the van, gazed idly up at the building and then carried the cradle to a point below the required window against the massive walls.

Major Chandler found his fingernails digging into the palms of his hands. Beside him, O'Keefe breathed heavily.

"Rather neat timing," said the civilian, a shade anxiously Major Chandler thought. "Ah, here come the heroes. The two johnnies on the right. Bowler hats. Very artistic operators."

The major gazed about him. The men indicated seemed

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to be two civil servants who were chatting amiably as they prepared to cross the road. Both men wore bowler hats and carried briefcases and umbrellas.

They were still a hundred yards from the cradle when the man who had gone into the building appeared on the roof and dropped the ropes. The painter below secured the cradle.

"Now then," said the civilian. "Little lesson in how to get a chap who has a big gun in his pocket."

The painter with the cradle, having now signalled to his mate on the roof that all was well, adjusted the pulley and looked carefully around him. The two civil servants, just drawing level with him, were now laughing heartily. The painter stepped into the cradle and turned round to face the wall. The very instant that he did so, one of the civil servants hit him on the head.

The movement was so casual that Major Chandler wondered for a moment if he had imagined it. He couldn't see what hit the painter. But something had. The man dropped to his knees and remained in the cradle with his head resting against the wall as though raptly examining the fabric. The two civil servants picked him up and carried him into the Ministry.

"Oh, very nice," said the civilian chuckling a little. "Dear me, those two get better and better. I think we might drift across now, Major. There's a little identification to be done, and I dare say the fellows from the Fulham Road will be turning up soon."

Three stiff whiskies on an empty stomach had wrought a great change in the major's outlook when he returned with O'Keefe to the War Office an hour later. He had found the whimsical civilian to be an admirable fellow with a very pretty wit; and also a keen sense for laying credit where it was due. He had given it as his opinion that some glory should come the major's way from this day's doings.

The major felt this himself, and, after handing over O'Keefe to Lieutenant Bitters who waited with Miss Polly Francis in another room, he went off to seek the colonel and receive the commendation that was his due.

He found the colonel sitting at his desk gazing into space. His face was still the dirty peach colour that he remembered.

"Well, sir," he said, "I expect you've heard everything went off all right. We got the lot of them."

"Let's hear your report."

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The major thought he sensed a certain abruptness in the colonel's voice and demeanour, but he went briskly into his account.

He was smiling modestly when he had finished, having provided the colonel with his cue.

The colonel, however, maintained a thoughtful silence. Presently he rose and, leaning against his desk, faced the major.

"That man O'Keefe—why was he in civilian dress?"

"O'Keefe, sir?" The major wondered if he had heard correctly. "Why, those were the clothes he ran off in."

"Proper ones, you felt, to enter my office in?"

The interview, Chandler was aware, had taken a decidedly odd turn. He stammered, "Well, sir, I thought in view of the emergency . . ."

The colonel walked to the window and brooded out with his hands behind his back.

"You know, Chandler," he said, after a while, "there are a lot of things I don't know about. I don't know if the Soviet Minister came today. I don't know what secrets, if any, the politicians gave him. I don't know anything about today's nonsense. The civilians have taken over the army, and I don't think they want us. But, by heaven," he said, turning round, "they've got us!"

He fixed Chandler with his yellow eyes. "And there is still one thing we can do which nobody can do for us. We can look after our own. That deserter—O'Keefe. Fix him up, Chandler. Don't let him write to his Member of Parliament —that confounded girl was raving about it. Send him to the glasshouse double quick and settle his hash. Murderous-looking oaf!"

The major recoiled at this naked speech. "But after all, sir—"

"I shall take a special interest in this case, Chandler. Fix him up."

"The Soviet Minister of Defence might have been shot."

"The Marshal," the colonel said. "There's a soldier for you, Chandler. A hundred and seventy-five divisions, he's got." His yellow eyes were misted in envy.

Chandler left him in this reverie and went off to make his written report, after which he joined the others. They were not to leave the building till seven o'clock. "Until," Lieutenant Bitters remarked, "a certain plane returns from whence it came, presumably."

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Miss Polly Francis contrived to get the major on one side before they left.

"You won't let anything happen to Harry, will you, Major Chandler?" she said.

"Ah, well. He'll get a fair hearing," the major said awkwardly, rather doubting this now.

"Because he's acted very bravely really. After all, he came running back to tell you about this dreadful plot."

"I believe you had something to do with that," the major said, rather hypnotised by her wondrous lips.

"Yes, I did," she said, with a queer little smile. "Was this man they tried to shoot important—some big Russian or—"

"I don't think we ought really to discuss that."

"No, but if he was shot there might have been a lot of trouble, perhaps even a war?"

"There might."

"If I hadn't made Harry go back. So you could say I stopped a war, in a way."

"In a way," the major said, this logic making the soundest sense as he gazed at her.

"That's what I thought," the girl said, giving his hand a brief squeeze.

There was no helicopter for them on the return journey. A jeep took the three men to the station and it was nearly ten o'clock when they arrived at the camp.

The whisky had turned sour on Major Chandler, and he had an abominable headache. He was aware that he had eaten practically nothing all day, but he did not think he could face any food. He had fallen into a mood of the profoundest depression.

It was true what the colonel had said. The country was in the hands of civilians. Today's gigantic nonsense had been stage-managed exclusively by them. He had really taken no part in it at all. He had been snatched out of his cosy rut and ordered about all day like some film extra.

A pang of extreme loathing for O'Keefe went through him. He almost wished the fool had shot the Russian Marshal. A thrust for the army, at least. As it was, there was no glory; only a liverish old colonel who would be watching him closely.

He brushed his teeth and undressed wearily and got into bed. And then he paused, racking his brains. Something had been left undone this awful day.

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Presently he bethought himself and got into his dressing-gown and slippers and padded over to his office. *The Times* was as he had left it, the crossword intact. He got back into bed and allowed it to do its healing work.

When Major Chandler switched out the light that night he was almost a man restored. The fantastic events of the day flickered only faintly in his mind. With just a little concentration he could make them disappear entirely.

His camp lay sleeping; the Ministry of Defence stood impregnable. The Soviet Minister of Defence, that Marshal of one hundred and seventy-five divisions, was safe in the Soviet Union. Only one disturbing element still throbbed in his brain—Private O'Keefe in the guardroom.

Settle his hash, the colonel had said. Send him to the glasshouse double quick. It seemed hard.

It was given to few defaulting privates to be involved in affairs of such moment. To fewer still to have a girl like Miss Polly Francis, who might have stopped a war . . .

Major Chandler doubted if the morale of the British Army would crumble if he took account of these singular circumstances and tempered his judgment.

Despite the colonel, he thought, winking into the colonel's yellow eyes as he sank down into sleep, he reckoned he might chance his arm a bit on this one.

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"He was practising his putting again."

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MEMORY IS A

No longer foreign, no longer an enemy, no longer difficult: everything about him was significant

JANE LISSON woke early in the morning of her thirtieth birthday, woke in the colourless, silvery emptiness of earliest dawn while the first birds were beginning to move uneasily amongst the thick leaves of the two big mango trees beyond the windows. She remembered at once that it was her birthday, that youth—genuine youth—was more or less officially over from today, and lay for some time remembering all the other birthdays which stretched back in a long line to childhood and disappeared into the hazy mists of early infancy.

Thirty. And in less than three more months Tom would be forty-six. Life—Time, at any rate—was carrying them both into its middle reaches. But before she reached another birthday Tom would almost certainly have his knighthood—the successful conclusion of this present job would ensure that. This time next year she would be thirty-one—but she would also be Lady Lisson. She considered the probability with the unemotional calmness of one whose deepest feelings have always remained placidly unstirred, a still pool over which no storms have blown. Life was taking youth from her and she accepted that it must be so: life would reward her with worldly success and calmly she would accept that, too.

The dawn brightened behind the mangoes and the birds began to bicker among themselves; their odd, harsh cries, so unlike the soft, sleepy notes of an English summer dawn, increasing in exact proportion to the expanding light. Jane rose and went to look at Tom lying asleep, his black, bullet head buried in the pillow, in the adjoining room. They were no longer lovers in the physical sense; Tom was not interested in love these days, and anyway he worked most of the night.

The dawn hours, before the great heat beat down in a blaze

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SMALL SHELL

by GWYN GRIFFIN

of light, were the best of the day. The big garden was delightful then; tinkling with the dozen artificial streams and rivulets of expensive artesian water which kept it green and fresh whilst the greater part of the city beyond had no piped water supply at all. If she woke in time, Jane always started the day by walking through the garden, feeding the parrots and white doves in the aviaries attached to the trees.

Descending the long, shallow flight of stairs, letting her fingertips run down the cool marble of the balustrade, she heard the clicking of a typewriter from the room adjoining her husband's private office. Mr. Samian, Tom's Armenian secretary, was already at work, for he too liked to take advantage of the cool dawn hours. What a worker the little man was; he must have been up with Tom until past two o'clock last night and now he was back at his machine hardly more than four hours later.

As she passed the door of his room the typewriter stopped abruptly and Jane heard the scrape of a pushed-back chair.

"Mrs. Lisson!" Samian appeared in the doorway smiling widely, showing three gold teeth, his lacquered black hair plastered to the sides of his skull, his dark eyes beaming at her through his spectacles.

"Hello, Sammy! You're early this morning." Jane smiled down at him and he, as if suddenly aware of his crumpled white suit, stringy black tie, and unshaven jowls, smiled deprecatingly with an almost furtive embarrassment. "Work, Mrs. Lisson—work. There is a lot to do— But no more of that. What I wish is to thank you so much, so *very* much, for your generous gift!"

"My—? Oh, you mean for your children's charity? It

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wasn't very much, I'm afraid. I couldn't find my cheque book, and that was all I had in my purse."

"Twelve pounds! It was too generous. It was magnificent!" Mr. Samian's hands lifted and opened in a gesture of delight. "You have no idea how much we can *do* with twelve pounds."

"No—" Jane nodded, amused and pleased—"I don't suppose I have. What can you do with it, Sammy?"

"Well—well, it will pay practically all the cost of our outing."

"Surely not! That is unless you have very few children and intend taking them only a very short distance."

"We have twenty-five children and we take them to the beach—what I think you call the seaside in England. I assure you that twelve pounds will pay for practically everything. The bus, the food, the drink..."

"Do you organise all this yourself, Sammy?"

The little man fluttered his hands in further self-deprecation. "Mostly—well, yes, Mrs. Lisson. But there is another lady, Mrs. Androutzos, who helps me. We do what we can." He paused, then said hurriedly, "She—like me—we lost our own children, you see, in nineteen fifty-eight; and so—"

"Oh God, did you?" Jane felt a sickness in her throat; she said suddenly, almost violently, "Why didn't you get out after that—go somewhere else? How can you go on living here after that?"

The thin shoulders under the creased white jacket lifted in the inevitable shrug. "Where else to go? All over it is the same."

"There must be somewhere."

"Nowhere, Mrs. Lisson—nowhere at all. So now I make my interest—one of my interests, I should say—this little Welfare Society. We have special permission, of course."

"Was that difficult to get?"

"Not really. They are better now, you see. Now that they are feeling they have less to fear, they are getting better. I always say this to Mr. Lisson. 'Dear Mr. Lisson,' I say sometimes when he is—" Samian giggled deprecatingly—"a little angry, a little impatient at some delay. 'Dear Mr. Lisson, they *are* better now.' You should perhaps remember how often they were betrayed, how often their friends—brothers and cousins, sometimes—were killed. You have never seen how they were killed in those days. Today it is the firing squad in the prison yard; then—at the best—it was

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stoning outside the Bab el Hamad where the rubbish is burnt. For seven years at any moment—any of them. But now they are feeling safer so they are more easy.

"I had no difficulty with the permission. No—money is the trouble, of course. Food prices, costs—everything goes up all the time. But your gift will allow us this outing. You have no idea how pleased the children will be! I wish, indeed, that you could see." He paused hesitantly, and then in a rush said, "You would not think me rude if I—if you think you would be able—of course you have many things to do, I know well—but if you would like to come . . ."

"On your outing, Sammy?"

"Only if you—"

"Why not? When is it?"

"You really would like to come?" Samian's eyes sparkled. "I will say to the children, 'This is Mrs. Lisson, who has—'"

"No you won't, Sammy. You won't say anything about me. Just let me come and see for myself."

An hour and a half later she sat with Tom at the breakfast table on the garden terrace. Tom, as usual, had forgotten her birthday, and this year his contrition was somehow less convincing; he was a worried and a busy man; there would be time for birthdays, endearments, presents, when the oil negotiations were satisfactorily concluded—later on.

Jane was used to her husband. She had deliberately married an ambitious, violently energetic, and rather ruthless man—and since that was the type of man she liked, she knew that she must put up with the inevitable domestic defects. She had smilingly shrugged away the matter of the forgotten birthday and told him about Samian's invitation and her acceptance.

"He's coming to collect me at three o'clock."

"What an awful hour!"

"I know, I know."

"You'll be back by seven, won't you? For this nonsense at the Embassy?"

Jane nodded. "I told him I must be." She looked across at Tom's dark face, thinking that no-one could take him to be his true age. Sometimes—after a good night's sleep, he looked twenty years younger, despite the amount he drank; a black-haired, stocky, pugnacious little man, still as decisive, able, and tough today as he had been as a young colonel of para-troops in the war. She had never been in love with Tom,

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even when she had married him; but as the years of their marriage passed, her original liking and admiration had increased to a warm fondness. Would this, she often asked herself, continue to increase until it became love? Could it? She ardently hoped so.

Now his hot dark eyes met hers and he grinned. "Not that it would matter much if we failed to turn up. Hubert and Edna are on the skids—on the way out."

"Really? How do you know?"

"I fixed it—that's how."

Jane laughed, half shocked, half amused. "Since when have you been in a position to fire Her Majesty's Ambassadors?"

"Since only very recently, I think. Hubert's useless, of course. He's one of the Old School Tie appointments. His sense of time and space is slipping, too. Last time I was at the Embassy he said—apropos of nothing at all, as far as I can remember— 'Do you recall how it rained so heavily at the garden party, Lisson?'

"'What garden party, Hubert?' I asked. (He hates me calling him Hubert—I think he imagines I ought to call him sir, or something.)

"'Come, come, Lisson,' he said, 'there is only *one* Garden Party, surely? The one at Buckingham Palace. Three years ago it rained very hard.'" Jane laughed.

"You do it on purpose. You try to annoy him."

"I try to make him see some bloody sense! He won't, though. The Junta runs rings round him and all he does is to complain that Rashid's not a gentleman! Why should he be? I can manage Rashid—at least quite often—just because he *isn't* a bloody gentleman. I say to him—in so many words —'Look, General, I'm not a gentleman—nor are you. Let's get together and have a sensible non-gentleman's agreement—no fooling. Keep your mucky hands off the oil fields and I'll see you have so many tanks and self-propelled guns that you'll be able to knock seven different sorts of hell out of the Jews over a weekend.'"

"What a horrible way of doing business!"

Tom grinned widely, delightedly; his eyes sparkled. "Isn't it? Particularly since everyone knows these people wouldn't have a hope if it came to the showdown they're always yelling for. Even if we made them a present of all the armour in the Atlantic Alliance, the Jews would still tear them apart in twenty-four hours. They probably will, one day, come to

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that. I shan't be sorry if they do, either." He paused. "Not that I dislike Rashid particularly—or the others. Sometimes I even think that I see their point of view in a way."

Jane said, "I wonder what they think of you."

"Do you? Well, I'll tell you something. Rashid is alleged to have said that he often wished I was working for him. He dislikes me—but only officially and on racial and political grounds, the way they dislike us all. But it's nothing to what he feels for old Hubert—that's personal, that is. Have you ever watched Rashid talking to Hubert? No? Well, you may get a chance this evening. Rashid's face goes almost grey with hate; he can hardly control himself. That's one reason Hubert's got to go. He should never have been allowed to stay on after the revolution, but he wanted to and his old friends at home saw to it that he had his way. He'd already lost Britain God knows how many million tons of oil; he'd been almost wholly responsible for the deaths of thirty-two British air force personnel and the destruction of our air base —but he'd been at Eton with half the Government and at Oxford with most of the House of Lords . . ." He shrugged.

"Anyway, last week while I was in London I brought the whole thing up at a conference of our lot. Everyone agreed he must go; and so, in a reluctant, mousy sort of fashion, did the Minister. But then the Old School Tie brigade rallied round in a big way. I listened to some of the phone calls on an extension in one of our offices and it was really almost frightening to see how these things were done. Everyone kept admitting that Hubert was absolutely useless but saying that he must keep his job because he was an old friend of their father's, or best man at a cousin's wedding in '23, or was going to inherit such a nice shoot up in Scotland when his brother died. In the end someone—a permanent under-secretary, I think—said, 'I don't see why dear old Hubert shouldn't stay on so long as Lisson does the actual work.' So the Minister had to explain that Lisson was not going to do the actual work unless Hubert left. After that it became a question of what to give Hubert in exchange to keep him happy, and of course they couldn't think of a damned thing Hubert could do until someone said he was very fond of animals. So I think the idea is to try to make him a Royal Warrener, or something—put him in charge of the rabbits. If they do, it will be the best appointment the government has made since it's been in office."

He glanced at his watch and rose, laughing. "But what

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does it matter to us? It makes me wild sometimes, because it's so bloody feeble and senseless; but then I say, 'Well, I'm only here for the cash, so what the hell . . .' "

Soon after eleven, when beyond the lowered blinds the sun lay over the garden in a blaze of white light, one of the servants announced Mrs. Stammensen. Jane put down her book as Mariella swept into the room, suffused in the peculiar mixture of enthusiasm and exhaustion which made her such uneasy company.

"Jane, honey—is it true? Is it really true that they're going—the Montecute-Preens? Oscar said he heard something but that maybe it was only a bazaar rumour. So I said, 'I'll go right round and ask Jane Lisson. After all, it's their Embassy,' I said. 'If Sir Hubert and Lady Edna are going, Jane'll certainly tell me,' I said."

"I believe they are. But, for heaven's sake, don't quote me as saying so."

"Honey! As if—"

"Tom says he thinks they've been recalled. We may know this evening, I imagine. You and Oscar will be there, I suppose?"

"I guess so. Oh yes—and Oscar wants to know if decorations should be worn."

Carefully Jane said, "I don't suppose Tom will wear his," and saw Mariella's small, animated face cloud in a quick expression of disappointment. Her husband possessed two medals from the Korean War and liked to display them whenever possible. "Oscar was there in his well-worn decorations—" Tom would say sarcastically on a return from some official function—"he's had them dry-cleaned again, but they're getting very frayed round the cuffs and collars . . ."

Mariella sat down and began explaining the difficulties of her present household and how much better things had been in the old days. Both the Stammensens had been in the city before the revolution, in the days when King Suleiman had governed the country—largely in accordance with the unsuitable directions, or at least the supervision, of Sir Hubert Montecute-Preen—and this made them feel like veterans and allowed them to dwell nostalgically upon a past of which more recent comers like the Lissons knew nothing. The revolution itself had been a traumatic experience from which Mariella had never completely recovered.

"Honey, you've no idea! Four days shut up in the Embassy—mostly in the cellars because they were shelling the New

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Quarter—and never knowing when they weren't coming gunning for us! I was crying practically all the time because the kids were in the States and I thought I'd never see them again. Oscar had a gun ready, and afterwards he told me that if they'd attacked the Embassy he was going to shoot me first and afterwards himself." Jane had recounted all this to Tom—who found Mariella's reminiscences a bore and who had said, "Oscar might have put the first part of the plan into operation—it would have made a magnificent excuse—but I doubt if he'd have done the second."

Now Mariella was on about her perpetual domestic troubles. "Of course, in those days there was no difficulty about servants at all. But now... And one just daren't say a thing in front of them! Oscar thinks most of them are planted on us... I'd like to tell Rashid what I think about it all, I really would!"

"Why don't you? He'll be there this evening."

"Oh, honey! And have us given four hours to pack and quit? Tell me, Jane—what are you going to wear?"

Jane told her. Then she said, "I've got another party first, though, so I may be a little late."

"Another party? Where?"

"A children's picnic. Sammy—you know, Tom's secretary—is organising it. He wants me to go, though I can't think why." Jane explained the little Armenian's anxiety that she should see his charity outing and Mariella became immediately enthusiastic to come too. "My, but that's an idea! And I could bring Carl and Lois, couldn't I? It would be just fine for them to play with some other kids for a change. Just you fix it with your Sammy, Jane darling."

"It'll be horribly hot."

"It'll be fun. Anyway it'll be something *new*—something *different*."

Jane did not really want Mariella Stammensen's company that afternoon. She was beginning, heaven alone knew why, to look forward with an oddly pleasurable speculation to the picnic. But the urgency in the American woman's voice moved her. Poor Mariella! Despite the gay talk of the old days it was easy to guess that life in this country held little interest and no pleasure for her; and unlike the Lissons—whose stay would be measured in months, a year at the most—the Stammensens were here on a permanent basis.

"Very well," Jane said, "I'll tell Sammy you're coming. I know he'll be delighted."

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"Typical American infiltration tactics," said Tom good-humouredly at lunch. "Don't tell her anything."

"What could I tell her? She's no more interested in oil politics than I am."

"Well, don't let her get Sammy into a huddle behind a bathing tent or a bun stall or something."

"I tell you, Mariella just isn't interested in oil!"

"All Americans are interested in oil, ducky—every single one of them."

Sammy came for her in his battered old Chevrolet soon after three, greeting her with effusive pleasure before they rattled off through the burning glare of the afternoon to collect Mariella and her two children. Jane, who an hour earlier had begun to regret the whole thing—the heat would be intolerable and her bedroom upstairs was so coolly inviting—found herself fascinated back into pleased amusement by the Armenian's clothes. Sammy had dressed carefully for the occasion in a tight red silk beach shirt, sky-blue shorts, and white ankle socks like a small child's; on his nearly bald head he wore a peaked yellow baseball cap with WEST COAST KILLERS printed on the front.

"Oh Sammy, how truly *sweet* you look!" exclaimed Mariella as soon as she saw him. "Just like you ought to be selling peanuts in the Bronx or somewhere." Both she and her children were dressed with the carefully international unostentatious smartness which characterises today's American abroad.

At one end of the Sharia Farik Rashid, before the courtyard of the Beit el Mal—the old Treasury—they found the decrepit bus containing the children and Mrs. Androutzos. Rows of small dark faces peered from the unglazed windows, faces which varied in colour from dusky white, through olive and lemon and ochre, to a glowing mahogany almost as dark as that of the soldiers before the gates of the Treasury into which Sammy now made his obsequious way. Except for the diplomatically privileged members of the small European community, practically nothing could be done in the city without various forms of permission granted from the Beit el Mal. Despite the fact that the arrangements for the outing had been made long in advance, it was almost fifteen minutes before Sammy emerged and they were able to set off.

Donkeys, camels, dust; three modern tanks, sinister and squat, outside the main post office; haggard-looking students

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on bicycles, stock soldiers in paratroop dishabille lounging at street corners, flocks of bleating, trotting goats—and then they were through the Bab el Hamad and outside the walls. Here lay the rubbish-scattered wasteground where the traditional gory butchery of stonings, decapitations, and judicial mutilations had taken place in the days of King Suleiman—and where, more recently, the hacked bodies of the King himself, his two brothers, and several minor members of the royal family had been exhibited on meat hooks by order of General Rashid.

They rattled on—with the Chevrolet in front to avoid the worst of the swirling dust from the unmade road—for half an hour between rocky hills of yellow earth, barren dry and breathless under the drumbeat of the sun. It was difficult, Jane thought, staring from one cracked window, to imagine anywhere—even hell itself—that could appear more inhospitable, more malignly inimical to mankind than this bitter, dusty landscape gasping in perpetual searing drouth up at the empty blue-white sky. And yet it was infinitely more valuable—a hundred thousand times richer—than the most fertile valleys of Europe or America. Below the bouncing wheels of the old car in which she sat lay millions of gallons of oil—oil for which Europe and America were prepared to bribe or blackmail anyone who could even temporarily claim to wield power over the half million bemused, vicious, and poverty-stricken Arabs who composed the population.

And then, at last, the sea; a vivid strip of green-blue that terminated, with no fuss at all, the endless-seeming aridity of sandy, broken, rock-strewn hillocks of shale. Without changing, without altering in the least, the barren wasteland abruptly halted at a little shelf some two feet high—then came a yard or so of wet sand with the water lapping gently at its farther edge. The very unspectacularity of the shore—or lack of shore, for there was none worth the name—made it almost awe-inspiring. Desert—sea. Nature could hardly be blamed, considering the dreariness of the whole insanely ugly landscape, for failing to soften the meeting with picture-postcard accessories.

"We go on another two kilometres, ladies!" shouted Sammy above the roar of his engine. "This is not where we are stopping."

"I certainly should hope not!" said Mariella to Jane, and then with a sudden squeal of glad recognition, "Oh! I know where we're going, now. Of course! Sammy—it's the place

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where there's that kind of pool—where the sea comes in through a sort of ditch—that's where you're taking us?"

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Stammensen—that place. You are quite right."

Mariella turned to Jane. "It's a sort of small lake of sea-water. It's—why, I guess it's four years since I was last there. We were with Prince Mahmud. Once, at a reception in the palace, Oscar was talking to Mahmud about how there was no swimming here because of the sharks, and Mahmud—he was a truly sweet kid, Jane, I've never been more thankful than that he was in England at the time of the revolution—he said, 'There is a place where one can swim, Mr. Stammensen, and if you and your wife like to come with me tomorrow, I'll show you.' He did too. We went in the evening and there were about ten of us, all told. We had a very, very lovely party." She sighed with a mixture of sorrow and remembered bliss. "But the old King—or so I heard—put a stop to Mahmud swimming there. He didn't want his grandson behaving like an ordinary fisherman, he said. So he ordered a big pool to be built in the palace gardens. It was never finished though—was it, Sammy?"

"No, Mrs. Stammensen. It was excavated, that was all."

"Wasn't that where the Queen and the other wives were—"

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Stammensen," Sammy called hurriedly over his shoulder. "Yes—that was where it was done. And now I believe that the place has been filled in. But let us not talk of such sad things. Look, we are here!"

They had emerged suddenly from between two high dunes of sand and before them lay a wide shallow lake, as still as glass under the high afternoon sky. Beyond a long narrow sand bar, the green waters of the Persian Gulf stretched away to the horizon and at one point the bar was cut by a channel little broader than a wide ditch—the inlet through which the ocean filled this small saucer-like depression below sea level. The car stopped, and behind it the bus jolted to a halt in a cloud of yellow dust. From the latter, twenty or so children of various ages from five to fifteen climbed down with a careful, orderly—an almost anxious—slowness as if they were all well over sixty years old and genuinely concerned about the possibility of a damaging fall between the two iron steps and the ground.

Jane watched them with interest; since Sammy's charitable association was for the benefit of the poor, she had expected a horde of screaming, laughing, ragged urchins to tumble from

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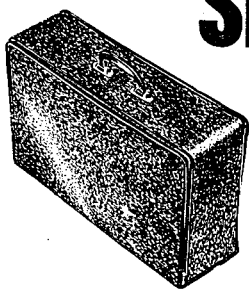

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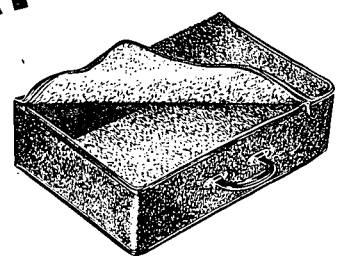

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the bus—instead of which she was confronted by a group of quiet, serious-eyed miniature adults in clothes which seemed, if anything, neater, cleaner, and more expensive than those of the two fair-haired Stammensen children. There was no noise, and little laughter, and the smiles that flickered over the well-washed olive and lemon faces were fleeting, deprecatory, polite.

The children moved carefully into the shade of the bus and remained there; small girls holding each other's hands or the hands of their brothers; small boys—the majority of whose fragile wrists were heavily manacled with large and elaborate watches—easing and stretching their lanky legs with the slow deliberation of meditating storks. There was a soft muted twittering as of timid yet slightly querulous birds adjusting themselves on their perches to roost.

This lack of energetic gaiety was more than made up for by Sammy, Mrs. Androutzos—a fat, heavily painted and perspiring woman with a dark moustache—and the native driver. These three threw themselves upon the task of unpacking the picnic equipment with frenetic speed and noise, and in a surprisingly short time a wide canvas awning was stretched between two poles and the roof of the bus, while close by a gay, brightly-striped tent rose on the sand.

Then Sammy planted two beach umbrellas beside his car and stood back panting and soaked with sweat. "Good! Now we are ready to commence!" He turned to Jane and Mariella. "First the children shall have a swim—it will cool them after the journey. Then I shall arrange for games to be played." He turned briskly to the group of children and, clapping his hands, spoke rapidly to them in, as far as Jane could make out, a sort of Levantine patois in which Greek, Turkish, and even a few stray French words figured.

At the word *swim* the two Stammensen children had rushed eagerly for their bathing things. In a few moments they were splashing into the inland lagoon with cries of delight.

"It is quite all right, Mrs. Stammensen," assured Sammy. "It is perfectly safe. There are no sharks and the bottom is of purest sand. They can swim, of course?"

"Sure. But—"

"Then they will be quite all right. Only that the water is very, very salt. They should not drink more than they can help. Ah, how good to see them so happy!" And indeed Carl and Lois were splashing and plunging like small dolphins, making the lake ring with their shouts. Sammy's charity

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children however, though they watched the two young Americans with every sign of approval, appeared reluctant to enter the water themselves. Sammy and Mrs. Androutzos, and even the native bus driver, urged them with gay cajolery, but they merely smiled politely and nodded—gripping each other's hands still more tightly than before.

At last Mrs. Androutzos, whose patience seemed less enduring than that of the others, ran at the girls and herded them with much clucking and waving of arms into the striped tent to change, while Sammy shepherded the boys under the awning. "Why, you silly fellows!" he shouted in English—for the benefit, presumably, of Jane and Mariella. "You are not frightened of the water, surely? Look, I beg you, at that nice American boy! What a good time he is having for himself!" But the little Greeks and Armenians merely smiled doubtfully and began slowly and with great care to unshackle their huge wristwatches.

Jane, sitting under one of the beach umbrellas with Mariella, whose eyes were glued to her own water babies, was wondering whether Sammy would ever get his charges in the lagoon when the question was solved abruptly for all of them.

With a roar of its powerful engine and a high, angry blast from its horn, an Army reconnaissance car dashed between the dunes and jerked to a halt in a cloud of dust some six feet from the rear of the stationary bus. It was filled with soldiers in the universal blotched paratroop overalls affected by every member of the new regime from General Rashid downwards, and beside the driver sat an officer wearing the big red-and-black shoulder-flashes of the Military Security Service—Rashid's political police. He leapt out as soon as the truck stopped and stood for a moment in an attitude which Jane felt he must have copied from old photographs of Mussolini—legs straddled apart, one hand on hip, the other on gun butt, chin thrust out. He saw Sammy and let out an astonishingly brutal shout in high guttural Arabic, but retained his pose as if waiting to be photographed.

Sammy trotted up to meet him, a small, ridiculously obsequious figure in his play clothes, pulling off his baseball cap and bowing with a servile hunch of his shoulders. Then he took some papers from his hip pocket and presented them.

Mariella nudged Jane. "You should never do that."

"What?"

"Show them your permission unless they ask for it first.

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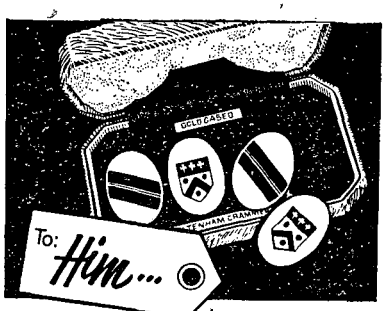

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You see, quite a lot of them can't read and it makes them real mad to have it shown up."

But the security officer could read. He studied the papers seriously for a moment, scribbled some note about them in a pocket book, and then, folding them carefully, tore them up and dropped the pieces at his feet. Sammy's shoulders hunched up so high that his head seemed nearly to disappear between them; his hands flew out in gestures of exculpation, supplication, despair. The officer said something brief, glanced round at the children, the tents, and the sun umbrellas, and shrugging, turned on his heel. He climbed back into his seat and the big Army vehicle roared, backed, turned, and shot off dustily between the dunes.

Sammy trotted over to the sun umbrella, his face a picture of distress and apology. "Ladies, this is very upsetting. We are not to stay here. I most carefully explained at the Beit el Mal that this particular place was our destination. They made no objection. Now I am told that it is a security area and that we should not be here—that we must go somewhere else at once. I am afraid that we must obey. I apologise most deeply for the inconvenience, but there is nothing I can do."

There was, of course, nothing anyone could do. The tent, awning, and umbrellas must come down, the young Stammensens must be called—protesting angrily—out of the water, everything must be packed up and loaded once more on the bus and the car.

"This sort of thing never happened—well, almost never—in the old King's time," said Mariella indignantly. "And calling this a security area! There's nothing here and never has been. And the trouble is that, as far as I know, there's only this one pool. I guess poor little Sammy'll have to think hard to find somewhere else for his picnic."

Sammy evidently thought so too, for when at last he climbed dripping with sweat into the driver's seat of the Chevrolet, his small, dark-jowled face was creased in worried thought. "Well—there is a place," he said, letting in the clutch with a jerk. "It is not much, I am afraid, and there is no bathing. But it is all that is left. From here—" he waved a hand at the shoreless edge where desert met sea—"right to the city slaughterhouse there is no beach at all."

"But beyond that?" asked Jane.

"Beyond that, Mrs. Lisson, it is strictly forbidden to go. To all persons it is forbidden. It is near the commencement

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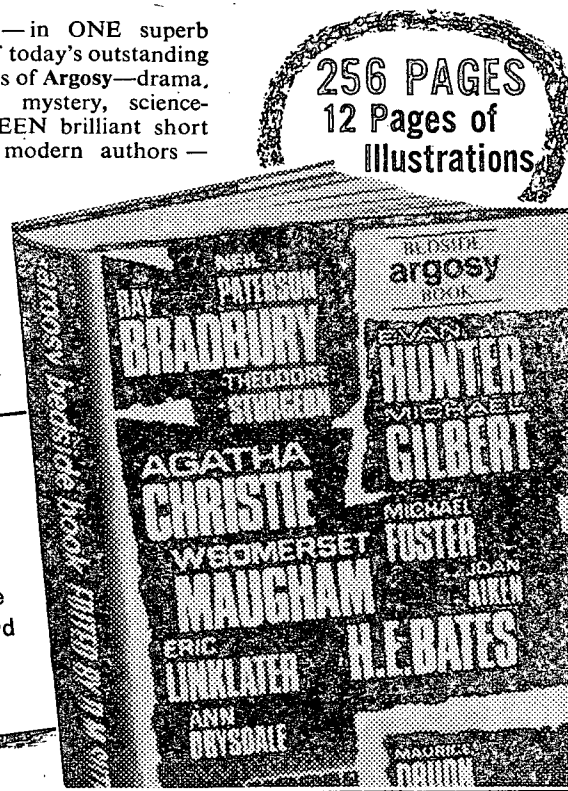

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of the oil fields, you see. So now—alas—we must accept a poorer site for our picnic."

And indeed it was much poorer, thought Jane, when some fifteen minutes later they drew up before a barely perceptible indent in the monotonous coastline. There was a beach of a sort but it was very small and nowhere more than twenty feet wide. On either side, sea and desert rolled away towards separate horizons and the declining sun beat down harshly on both.

Once again the tent, awning, and sun umbrellas were erected; once again the children—with the exception of Carl and Lois Stammensen, who were demanding why-in-hell they couldn't go into the sea—waited patiently in the shade of the bus. As soon as the shelters were up, the children, wilting slightly, were herded under them and refreshed with lemonade from a great demijohn. And immediately this was done, Sammy and Mrs. Androutzos, backed and assisted as before by the bus driver, began to organise party games.

Jane had never seen such organisation before—but then neither had she seen such party games. They were presumably of Greek, or perhaps Turkish, origin—formal, complicated, and performed with an air of such serious purpose that she felt as if watching some complex religious rites. It seemed that some of the games were playable only by boys, and others only by girls; though what esoteric canon made them unsuitable for mixed participation it was impossible to say. Some required the passing from hand to hand of a handkerchief, others the considered movement of several stones—most appeared to contain a high content of numerology—and none required anything save the minimum of physical movement. They all looked dreadfully dull.

"What are they doing?" asked Mariella.

It was an unwise question, for Sammy at once launched into a description of great complexity and length; but, as the games could only be explained as they were being played and as the various moves in them progressed much faster than his explanation, he was soon bogged down in a mass of retrospective detail and became somewhat *distrait*. "You will recall that when the little girl on the left—no, the right—passed the handkerchief behind her to that little boy—no, not the one who is now passing it to the other, but the one before him... Wait—*regard*, please. At present they are counting—five, six—seven. Seven is the number for which

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we are waiting, you see, because in this game the numbers signify—among other things—the days of the week. Now she passes to her friend. He gives it back to Tuesday—meaning that *on* Tuesday he will return. The boy with the blue shirt is Tuesday, you see. No—wait—he must, I think, be Thursday. It is the little girl who is Tuesday. The boy with the blue shirt cannot therefore be Thursday—unless he is out of place, silly fellow. Perhaps if we started again it would be easier..." But at this suggestion there were immediate chirping protests and one of the smallest girls—she had evidently been winning—dissolved into silent tears.

"Do they *like* these games, Sammy? They seem so terribly strict."

"But of course, madam! They receive the greatest pleasure from playing them. Yet we must find something which your own children can also play with ease and also with joy. Now let me think."

Then the Army car was suddenly back again and the security policeman, his face dark with rage, leapt out and stormed across. Sammy turned, his jaw dropping, to receive a volley of shrill abuse which continued for nearly five minutes.

"He's working himself up," muttered Mariella, staring at the contorted, pale brown face of the police officer, and Jane seemed to catch a note of distinct fear in her voice. "Sammy's done something. There'll be trouble now—perhaps for all of us." The officer's notebook was out and names were being demanded and taken down: Sammy... Mrs. Androutzos... the bus driver.

"You've got your passport with you of course, honey?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll be all right—I hope. Here he comes."

Sammy was at the officer's side explaining urgently, and the officer himself was nodding brusquely, his face set in sulky arrogance. Though not a tall man, he was of a better, heavier build than the majority of the stunted, emaciated inhabitants of this desolate little country, and unlike all the others whom Jane had seen, he was cleanshaven—a most unusual condition for an Arab. When he spoke it was, surprisingly, in English. "I must see your passports, please" —a light, cold, impersonal voice.

He took both passports and while he examined them with the usual suspicious closeness, Jane found herself thinking, as on previous occasions, that despite their generally unpleasing

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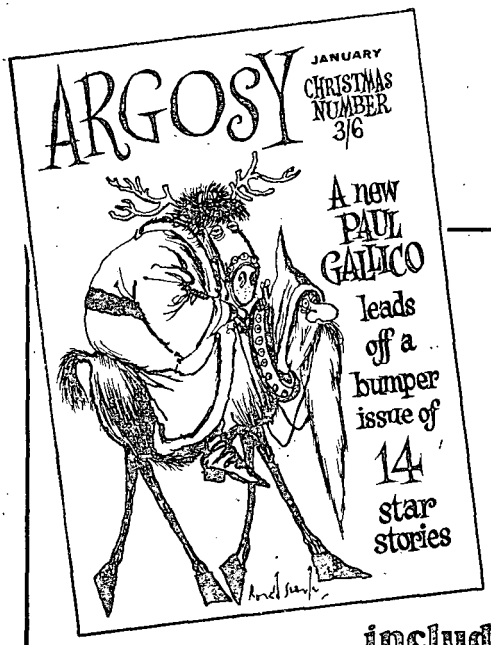

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physical appearance, practically all Arabs had the most beautiful hands—small and finely boned as a child's, with narrow sensitive fingers and pale, almond-shaped nails. But as the officer leafed through personal data and visas she noticed that the back of his left hand was marked with a deep pink-brown scar and, when he handed back Mariella's passport, she saw its identical copy on the right one and despite the heat she shivered. Tom had told her, until she stopped him, about the things that had been done in King Suleiman's prisons, and she realised that the young man who was now returning her passport had once had both his hands nailed to a wooden floor—perhaps for several days, perhaps for a week or more.

"And now, please—what are you doing here with these people?"

Sammy at once began a voluble explanation in swift Arabic, but it was curtly silenced.

"I want to hear what they say themselves."

Jane explained her own involvement in the charity picnic and how Mariella had come to be included. The officer nodded, silently glancing from one to the other of them. His eyes were a hard blue-grey which seemed doubly cold by contrast to his pale brown skin. It was a physical characteristic which marked him as of Turkish descent for, until the First World War, the country had been a neglected *vilayet* of the decaying Ottoman empire.

"I understand. Very well. But you are in a prohibited area." He turned to Sammy, cringing gently at his side. "This man I have told already *once* that he is in a security area. And now I find he has failed to leave it. And you are both with him."

"But we didn't know. And we are doing no harm."

"It is a security area."

"And there's nothing here."

"It is prohibited."

Jane looked round at the narrow piece of beach; at the sea, beginning to glare and flash now under the slant of the descending sun, at the tent and the awning, and the little group of children. If they were to be turned off this last possible site, the picnic, Sammy's so-carefully planned charity outing, would be ruined. She said, "It would only be for another hour—or an hour and a half. We would all go immediately after that."

Mariella was nudging her urgently, and Jane remembered

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that she—and Oscar and Tom, for that matter—always affirmed that one should never argue with these people—"They hate us and they are always looking for an excuse to withdraw our residence permits. *Never* argue with them." But now, with the success or failure of Sammy's outing seeming to hang in the balance, she said, "There is nowhere else to take these children, you see."

"I do not know." He was staring at her oddly, suspiciously perhaps, but his voice was calmer; the edgy tenseness of his early remarks had gone. "But you cannot stay here. You must move another kilometre along the road. After that you can go where you like." Suddenly, surprisingly, he smiled. "Have you not been told never to argue with us?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then do not do so." He turned away and then, as an afterthought, threw over his shoulder, "Why do you not go home? It is ridiculous at this hour to be out in the sun." Without looking round he climbed into his car and was once more whisked away in a cloud of dust.

"For goodness' sake, honey—" said Mariella plaintively—"don't you ever do that again! You could have had us all arrested. If he'd lost his temper—and they *always* lose their tempers as a rule..."

"Ladies, I think that we must return. I am most sorry for all the inconvenience—deeply sorry. But now for all of us it is best to go home."

"But they haven't—" Jane nodded towards the children—"had their picnic yet, Sammy." She felt oddly exhilarated by her encounter with the Arab officer; a desire to laugh welled up inside her, so that she wondered if the strain, the tension of the last few minutes, had made her hysterical. But that was most unlikely; she had not an hysterical nature and, besides, she had not been aware of any particular strain.

She shook her head. "No, we won't go home yet. You must find somewhere else, Sammy."

"But Mrs. Lisson, I do not think—"

"You must try."

"But Captain Khalil *suggested* we go home."

"Is that his name—Khalil? But he didn't say we must. So we won't," her voice was firm. "We'll go back another kilometre and look for another place."

And so once again the tent and awning came down, once more the children obediently re-entered the bus. The sun was much lower now and as the little convoy set off down the

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unmade bumpy road a puff of breeze from the sea, fanning the dust of their progress, blew through the open windows of the Chevrolet and touched their hot damp flesh with a quick caress.

They were almost at the slaughterhouse—a long, corrugated-iron building jutting into the sea—before they found another site, and far off over the waste of stony hillocks and dunes the city could be seen sprawling squalidly in the desert. It was Jane and Mariella who decided where to stop; Sammy appeared to have resigned himself to obeying their orders for the rest of the day. "This is all there is, now," he said, "if Mrs. Lisson thinks it will do."

"It will have to," said Jane, viewing the scattered stones of a dusty slope leading down to the water's edge. "It's not much worse than the last place."

So once again the equipment was unpacked and erected. But now—perhaps because of the small breeze that blew from the sea and the lowering of the intolerable temperature of the last hours—an odd change came over the party; a reversal of attitudes. Sammy and Mrs. Androutzos, the bus driver and Mariella—all the adults, except Jane—who had been so determinedly gay and energetic earlier in the afternoon, seemed sunk in a tired apathy, while the original timidity and diffidence of the children had correspondingly evaporated, giving place to a happy ebullience, almost European in its hilarity. Delightedly, now, they swarmed out of the bus and, no longer clustering in its shade, ran wildly about the dusty slope, apparently collecting stones.

"They *are* enjoying themselves, aren't they?" said Mariella, as surprised as the others at this change of mood. "What are they doing, Sammy—looking for shells?"

It was Mrs. Androutzos who answered, speaking for the first time in horribly accented English. "They search for scorpions," she said gloomily.

"Scorpions! Whatever for?"

"To make so they fight."

"But—isn't that very dangerous?"

"Yes."

"I mean—won't they get stung?"

"Yes."

"Jane! We must stop this. Jane, we must get them together and make them play something or other. Carl, honey, get your bat. We'll try and teach them to play softball."

And in a short time, while Sammy interpreted with

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enthusiastic inaccuracy, a game of softball was in progress and the scorpions were forgotten.

"Now—" said Mrs. Androutzos—"we will make ready the food." Followed by the two European women, she moved heavily away towards the baskets and boxes which the driver had piled under the awning. "When they have finished the American game they will be hungry, I think."

Ta'amia . . . burek . . . loukoumadés . . . aish-es-seraya . . . small fried cakes of crushed haricots, green coriander, and garlic; red pancakes stuffed with spices and yoghurt; tiny doughnuts floating in liquid honey; long bread-cakes covered in sticky yellow cream; *rizagalo, baklawa, loukoumi.*

"I guess there's nothing my two can eat," said Mariella, shaking her head over the array of Greek and Turkish-Arab foods.

"The *loukoumi* won't hurt them."

"Oh Jane—it just makes them so sick! They love it but it's not wholesome."

"This?" suggested Mrs. Androutzos, displaying a large flabby white sausage.

"What is it?"

"*Cossina.* It is very good. An Armenian lady make it every Friday. It is of the interiors of chickens and goat cheese and onions and many spices—also honey."

"They'll just have to wait till we get home. I can't think what— Oh Jane, look—he's coming back—your police friend. Well, of all the—!"

The three women, their hands full of wrapping paper and half-opened packages of oriental food, stared across the desert, already beginning to glow orange in the light of the falling sun, to where the Army car could be seen approaching in its inevitable dust cloud—a dust cloud also tinted an orange-pink.

"We're all right here. He said only another kilometre and Sammy drove nearly two."

"But he suggested we should go home."

The camouflage-painted car approached more slowly this time and Jane saw that it contained only two men. For a moment she thought that the figure beside the driver was not, after all, Khalil and felt a sudden obscure disappointment—she wanted, somehow, to see him again though she could not have told why. But as the heavy ugly vehicle bumped over the slope towards them and braked to a halt she saw the red-and-black flashes on the overalls. "It's him, all right."

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Khalil got out and waited while the driver fumbled in the back of the car and lifted out a large palm-mat bag. Then he walked over to the women, who had been joined by a frightened Sammy. "So you have come to the correct place." He glanced at Sammy and, speaking in slow English, said, "This was where the Beit el Mal told you that you might come."

For a brief moment the little Armenian seemed about to disagree—but then he caught the meaning behind the Arab's words. "Yes, yes, Captain. This place, certainly. It was all my fault—my mistake. I did not realise at first that we had gone too far."

"Yes—so I had no choice—only to tell you to return here."

"Yes, yes—of course. It was all my fault."

"I do not wish to make difficulties for you. But I have my duty to perform."

"Captain—it was all my fault. I apologise most very deeply. We have put you to trouble. We are most sorry."

Khalil glanced quickly at the two European women for whom, it was plain to all of them, this conversation was being carried on. For some reason they were to be placated. Between Khalil's first abrupt arrival at the lagoon and the present hour there had been a hurried conference in the Beit el Mal as some new shift in the ever-veering policies of the Junta had taken place. Now he motioned his driver forward and pointed to the bag which the man carried, "These are for you and your children." The bag, opened, was seen to be full of mangoes and melons—fruit which came almost certainly from the great gardens of the ex-Royal Palace.

And now, showered with Sammy's profuse thanks, he relaxed slightly and, turning to the circle of children who had gathered round, said something in Arabic and smiled. There was an answering chorus from the children, many of whom lightly touched their breasts and foreheads in the Arab manner.

"And now—please continue." He stood, hands on hips, watching as the children arranged themselves upon the carpets while Sammy, Mrs. Androutzos, and the bus driver began to serve the food; and the attempt at good humour of a minute before died slowly from his face, to be replaced by the sombre, sullen aloofness which characterised the present military ruling caste.

He seemed in no hurry to depart and though the children, now absorbed in eating, were largely oblivious of his presence,

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Sammy was scuttling about with all the nervous despair of a chicken who feels the presence of a hawk nearby, yet can find no shelter. For a moment Khalil watched Mariella's distracted attempts to prevent Carl and Lois from eating the more outlandish foreign foods and then turned to Jane, "Why cannot those two have also what the others have?"

"Their mother thinks it will make them ill."

"They will all be a little ill later, of course, because they will eat too much. But that is natural for children."

"Americans believe in a balanced diet."

"But not their children, I think." He pointed to Carl, who had acquired a piece of the peculiar sausage called *cossina* and was wrestling with his mother in order to retain it. "All children are alike." He paused, "You have no children, Mrs. Lisson, I think?"

"No."

He nodded, moving slowly away, and Jane found herself doing the same. There was something about him which held for her an indefinable, deep, partly unwilling fascination. Probably it was the fact that they both belonged to violently opposed interests—belonged to camps implacably inimical to each other. Hatred, bitter contempt, fear, and loathing—all the worst human emotions smouldered, sparked, and flashed between Rashid's Junta and the Anglo-Americans with whom they endlessly negotiated in an atmosphere thick with every conceivable sort of treachery. In the dark head beside her—almost on a level with her own, for they were much the same height—was a knowledge of things for which Tom or Oscar Stammensen would pay very heavily from their secret funds. It was just possible that Khalil wished to sell something and was making a first contact. It was possible—but it was also very unlikely. Since Suez, the entire Arab world—with the exception of a puppet king and a few reactionary sheikdoms—was solid in its hatred of Britain. Khalil belonged to the generation which had won, in blood and fear, a dangerous and precarious freedom—but freedom, for all that—and then had seen it suddenly imperilled by the powerful West. It was more probably a mere innate suspicion of foreigners that kept him here. His next words seemed to confirm this. "Why did you come with these children, since you have none of your own?" He turned his face towards her and the hot red light of the falling sun made it glow like copper.

"Well—I paid for the outing, you see."

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"You did? For what reason, please?"

"It's a charity. And Mr. Samian, who runs it, is my husband's secretary so—"

He nodded, smiling. "Yes, yes, I know all that. But it is a little unusual for an English lady to interest herself in this sort of people."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"And unusual happenings it is my work to examine," but he spoke mildly as if the matter was no longer of much interest.

They were at the shore's edge now and the sea, reddened by the sunset, stretched out at their feet. Jane said, "I came because I wanted to see, that's all. There is nothing sinister about it."

But he had been staring down into the shallows and now suddenly, he stepped from the little shelf of the sea's edge, planted one heavy boot in the lapping water and bent to pick something from beneath the ripples.

Back at her side he displayed a small red cowrie shell. "I have never seen one this colour before." In the sunset light the little shell glowed doubly red, a deep pulsating crimson as if the blood-dyed waters of the Gulf themselves had coloured it.

Khalil handed it to Jane, "You like? Then keep it for remembrance of today."

It was a very ordinary gesture; there was nothing more in it than a mild desire to please. The attention of a young man had been caught by something flickering under an inch or two of water; he had retrieved it out of curiosity, found that it was merely a small seashell, and given it to the woman to whom he happened to be talking. Nothing was implied, nothing suggested, nothing meant. And yet, in that short moment, as the red cowrie, wet and gleaming from the sea, passed between their hands, something happened to them both. Something which neither of them desired in the least, or understood—or wished to understand. Time stopped and they stood lighted for each other in the hot-coloured sunset as with a fatal halo. The red cowrie between their two hands was a violently sensitised conductor through which their spirits passed smoothly and instantaneously to mingle for ever in a single entity, and though in future they would always be apart they would always be painfully aware that this was so. The shell transmitted complete knowledge, instinctive, unreasoning—and they knew each other as well as they knew themselves. They learned, in that brief moment, life's falsest

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promise and most true fulfilment, as silly as it is god-like, as irresistible as it is fatal.

Many, many years later, an old widow dying slowly after the last of several more or less hopeless operations, Jane would ask for her red shell, and when it was brought to her she would murmur something that to the attendant doctor sounded like an Arabic name. Much sooner—hardly seven years away—Khalil, now in full general's uniform, albeit dirty and blood-spattered (for a new Junta had fallen and he and his colleagues were being taken out beyond the Bab el Hamad to die in the old way) would stare down at his chained hands and remember that they had once held a red shell and say, "Jane!"

Then the cowrie was in Jane's hand and his had fallen to his side: they were able to think, speak, act again as individuals. And now they were both horribly embarrassed; under the embarrassment a mass of complicated emotions—exultation, delight, fear, and a premonition of despair struggled in vain. Now all that mattered was that they should part quickly—before parting became intolerable or impossible. Turning, they walked back to the car and Jane, the older and perhaps the less frightened of the two, stole one look at him and saw that he was quite different from everything she had imagined him to be before. No longer foreign, no longer an enemy, no longer in the least difficult to understand—everything about him was significant and comprehensible.

He kept his own face averted and only when they were both back beside his Army vehicle did he raise his eyes to hers. He smiled widely, delightfully, started to hold out a hand but, fearful to renew the experience of a few minutes before, changed his mind and climbed into the seat beside the driver. "We shall meet again, I think."

"Yes."

Then he was gone—a smudge of dust dwindling away into the falling dusk towards the lights of the city—and Jane stared after him, the shell hard and cool in her hand.

On the way back, Mariella was full of the success of the picnic and forebodings concerning the effects of the food her children had eaten. Jane, only half listening to the flow of talk, answered absently and at random until Mariella said, "Honey, what's wrong with you—you're not sick, are you?"

In the darkness of the old Chevrolet Jane felt herself reddening. "No—it's just that I'm tired, I suppose."

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"That officer—" Mariella's voice was suspicious—"he didn't say anything—anything out of place?"

"No, no."

"What were you two talking about?"

"Nothing at all, really."

There was a long pause, then Mariella said apologetically, "I shouldn't have asked, honey, I know. Oscar's always warning me not to ask questions. Only I just didn't think . . ."

Jane gave a quick exasperated snort of laughter. "We weren't talking oil politics, I promise you! I thought at first —but all we spoke about was a shell he found in the water." The cowrie was still clutched tightly in one hand, hot now with the heat of her palm. She would see him again soon; she was certain of that. He had said they would meet again and they would. She knew in the back of her mind that any further meeting would be a wildly dangerous and foolish act on both their parts, but at the moment this did not matter in the least. Had she been younger she would, perhaps, have been frightened; have thought of the future, her own inexperience, the rights and wrongs of everyone else, and the almost certain wrecking of two men's careers and her own life. But being thirty she was wiser and more irresponsible, unfrightened of the world's censure, and certain only that this experience, which she thought had bypassed her, had come at last and must be grasped whatever the consequences.

Somewhere in the darkness of the suburbs the bus loaded with children must have turned off to deliver its load at their respective homes for when, after putting down Mariella and her children, Sammy drove up to the Lissons' house, they were alone. She complimented him on the success of his outing and listened to further outpourings of verbose gratitude for her kindness in placating Captain Khalil.

"That was not very difficult."

"Oh yes, Mrs. Lisson, you were most brave! Khalil es Sadry is a very dangerous man." Sammy glanced around him in the darkness and lowered his voice. "They are all dangerous, the police, of course—but he . . ."

The Armenian hesitated and then, his words a whispered rush, said, "In nineteen fifty-eight when the old King set them on us in order to save himself and his throne—he, Khalil, was one of the worst. He is a Turk, you see—or mostly Turkish. He took the soldiers into our quarter, from house to house—"

"No, no!"

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"Yes, Mrs. Lisson, yes! And you know what they did. And now I will tell you something very secret because you are our true friend—after today no-one can doubt it. Later this devil plotted against the King and we discovered this. One of us informed—very secretly. So he was taken to prison and very badly hurt."

"I saw his hands."

"Not only his hands. Because of what was done to him in prison he can never marry—can never have children. For an Arab that is very terrible, of course."

But it made no difference—how should it? Dressing for the Embassy reception—Tom was delayed at his office and had left a message that he would join her there—Jane told herself continuously and with a mixture of fear and anger that it made no difference. It was almost certainly untrue. Sammy hated the Arabs—understandably enough—and would calumniate any of them. It was a silly lie based on some grain of truth. Oh yes, there was probably some bloodshed in Khalil's past, for he had been a revolutionary and was now a political policeman, but no more than he shared with the rest of the rebellious Army which had overthrown the savage Suleiman. Nothing more than that—surely. Somewhere at the back of her mind a tiny voice said coldly that Sammy had spoken no more than the truth and that she, a married woman of thirty, had developed a sudden mad and violent passion for a mutilated murderer. But she would not listen, and slipping the red cowrie into her evening bag she swept, hot-faced and distracted, out of the house to the waiting car.

The British Embassy was new and too small and therefore too hot—the old one, slightly larger than the ex-Royal Palace, had been gutted in the first days of the revolution—and the main *salon* on the second floor was overcrowded this evening and more uncomfortable than ever. Oil politicians of various nationalities, hot and harassed in evening dress, stood about with whisky glasses in their hands and failed to mix with the small khaki-uniformed figures of the military government.

Above the crowd towered the desiccated six-foot-four figure of Sir Hubert Montecute-Preen, white-haired, white-moustached, his small sly eyes of faded blue moving vaguely across the crowd of his guests, for every single one of whom he felt either dislike or contempt and often both. In a small space at one end of the room and surrounded by his close associates, General Rashid Abdul Halim stood, staring down

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at the glass of lemonade in his hand. It was rumoured now that in the privacy of his own home he drank heavily, but in public he had to give the impression of being as good a Moslem as the ruler he had deposed and killed. Sooner or later he would have to go through the ordeal of conversing with his host—he was putting it off for as long as possible.

Jane greeted Oscar Stammensen and one or two of his colleagues, inattentive to their carefully polite talk. Everyone guarded his tongue in this country and at an Embassy reception the guard was so heavy and rigid that conversation was almost impossible. Why—oh, why had not Sammy been equally discreet?

Then suddenly she saw him—talking to the wife of a military attaché near an open window at the other side of the room. Out of the heavy paratroop overalls and in smart khaki drill, he looked smaller, neater. He stood listening, nodding to the remarks of the military attaché's wife, the inevitable glass of lemonade gripped in one scarred hand. And watching him standing there so quietly, so ordinarily—a decorous guest at a too-formal party—Jane felt a sudden aching tenderness for him. Even if all Sammy had said was true—and she knew inwardly that it was—it only added, in some as yet obscure way, to his passionate attraction for her. It should have revolted her, but it did the reverse of this. She took the red cowrie from her bag—furtively, as if it was something she had stolen—and held it in her closed hand.

He saw her, and across the room he smiled at her, his pale eyes lighting up with joyful recognition. Then he made some excuse to the attaché's wife and came quickly towards her as she, forgetful of the two men to whom she was talking, moved involuntarily to meet him.

She could never remember what they said then. Faintly smiling, mutually absorbed, they held each other's eyes and it was obvious to everyone that they were lovers. The whole gathering turned to watch them.

And then, out of a dream, someone was tugging at her arm and she turned to find Tom beside her. For a moment she stared at him bemused; still lost in the solitary world which she and Khalil inhabited—a world in which they walked together through some moonlit enchanted garden.

"Jane—you must come at once!"

She saw then that something was wrong; that Tom was furiously angry—angrier than she had ever seen him—his face crimson, his eyes narrow points of rage. Dragged brutally

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from the new dimension she had so recently entered, she stammered, "What—? I mean, why—?"

"I'll tell you outside. Only come *now*!" He was pulling her away towards the stairs, throwing a surly, brief, "I'm sorry, but we have to go," over his shoulder to Khalil, bumping into people without apology, heading bull-like for the door.

"Tom! Tom! I must go back. I—I must say goodbye—"

"You don't have to say anything!" They were through the door now and descending the stairs. Panic flared in her at the sudden thought that Tom must have found out... But how could he? She had only met Khalil four hours ago —had never even seen him until this afternoon.

"What is it? What is it!"

"We've been recalled!" Tom's voice was almost breathless with rage, "Hubert did it. He must have found out through one of his friends at home. Everything's been reversed; he's to stay—I'm to go. They're mad in London to do this!"

"But—" she was overcome by the suddenness of his words; refused to face the implications for herself—"you can't go now—at *once*—like this! You've got to hand over and—"

"No, no! God, no! I'm not handing over a thing! I'm leaving everything unfinished—just as it is. Hubert can work it all out for himself from now on—handle Rashid himself, wreck everything I've done—all the agreements we've reached —and then saunter home wearing his Old Etonian tie and go to the Garden Party!" He swore furiously. "We pack and catch a plane tomorrow morning!"

They were at the car and Tom wrenched open the door, "Get in!" She hesitated on the most momentous decision of her life. Khalil—Khalil! She had known him only four hours; she was thirty years old and in love for the first time— and she knew well enough that it would be the only time. If he had followed her down—if, even now, he would come to a window and give some sign... She looked wildly up at the windows which glowed with light along the facade of the Embassy but no figure moved in them—no-one looked down.

"Get in! Get in!"

And with a gasp of despair she did as she was told and the car door slammed abruptly behind her with a crash.

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cool drinking

AFTER France, Italy is the world's largest wine producer, and nearly one quarter of the population, about twelve million people, are engaged in vine growing and wine making.

The United Kingdom is a large importer of Italian wines but very little is known about their immense variety. Most people think in terms of Chianti and Vermouth—but there are, in fact, nearly two hundred and fifty varieties of wine made all over the country from the high slopes of Alpine valleys to the extreme south of Sicily.

It is perhaps not surprising that Chianti is the best known wine name out of the many Italian ones, for it has been made for over one thousand years. One of the best, from Tuscany, is Chianti Bessi, made from four different varieties of grape, blended by a second fermentation. The best of the Chianti Bessi, put into the flask in Italy, costs from 15s. to 18s., the white being of the same high quality as the red.

But other Chiantis of distinction are Mazzoni, Mirafiore, Ruffino and the white Antinori.

Valpolicella, a wine with a wonderful ruby colour, has been called the claret of the Veronese; it costs 14s. 6d. for the estate-bottled wines such as Fratelli Bolla, and 10s. for a London-bottled wine.

Valpolicella Arena is particularly popular with the Italians. Friesa is a sweet red wine from Piedmont, while Barbera is to the people of Turin what Beaujolais is to the citizens of Paris. Plenty of it comes to Britain to be sold at about 10s. a bottle.

For those who like a golden, sweet and aromatic wine, the Orvieto Abboccato is the one to go for, but the Orvieto Peturbani is dry.

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The white Bigi is dry or sweet and costs about 15s. a flask. Lacrima Christi, made from grapes grown on the slopes of Vesuvius, is the most famous of the Italian sweet wines.

The Italians love sea food, and often choose the white dry Verdicchio from the Adriatic side of Italy to go with it. An unusual white wine, also excellent with fish, is the Tiroler Riesling. It is not easy to find but J. H. and J. Brooke of Folkestone and Canterbury have it at 10s. a bottle.

In Rome, they drink the wines grown near to the city, and among those that come to Britain are the dry Frascati, which is stronger than it first appears. In recent years the Italian Rosé wines have become popular and among the best are Montresor, Lison Rosé, Arneo and Count Vaselli's Orvieto.

The sparkling wines of Italy are mainly for those who like them sweet, but the Cinzano Spumante is classed as extra dry. Asti Spumante, costing a little over 20s. a bottle, is sweet, while Recioto del Nobile Valpolicella is a medium dry sparkling wine that is quite out of the ordinary. It costs about a guinea a bottle and Peter Dominic is one of the few firms who import it.

Italy produces a wide range of Vermouths, which one can drink plain but iced; with mineral water; or as the basis of a cocktail. All are wines, whereas Campari is a spirit.

The best known Vermouths include Carpano Punt e Mes, Cinzano, Cora, Gancia and Stock.

Sicily has its own wines and they have a character all of their own. Corvo is a dry white wine of notable quality—and when estate-bottled costs about 15s. a bottle. Sicily is also the home of Marsala, used a lot in cooking and *flambé* dishes, but not as often as it should be as an aperitif. The medium dry Florio is about 13s. 6d. a bottle.

It may be asked which are the " great " wines of Italy. The best answer is that those of notable quality include Barone Ricasoli's estate-bottled red Brolio from near Siena; the white and red chateau-bottled Freccia Rossa; and the dry red estate-bottled Ferrari Bardolino.

It is not generally realised in Britain that the production and naming of wines in Italy is strictly controlled, and in 1963 and 1964, the laws that had been passed in 1925 were brought up to date giving a high degree of protection to the consumer. But these wines would be better known in Britain if many of the smaller Italian restaurants would only take the trouble to stock wines of class.

John Baker White

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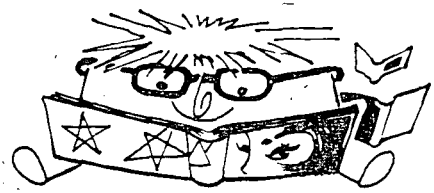
bookshelf



JOHN PEARSON describes his *Bluebird And The Dead Lake* as the story of the strangest record ever won. It is in fact the case-history of a very brave man and his obsession; an obsession that started when he was a youngster and which was strong enough when he grew to manhood to make him risk his life day after day.

Lake Eyre is a salt lake in the heart of an Australian desert. It was in this desolate place that the battle had to be fought against unpredictable weather, mechanical upsets and problems, the human element and the illness of Donald Campbell himself. All very exciting, and it reads as grippingly as a fictional adventure yarn. (Collins, 21s.)

David Beaty has written another of his flying novels, this time set in a cadet training-college, called *Sword of Honour*. The sword is the prize to be won on graduation, and the two chief contestants seem to be the average Benson and the star-pupil Miller. Also in the reckoning is the trainer plane "the Bastard," which more than lives up to its name. But the real fight is between these two hot-blooded pilots over who gets the beautiful girl. (Secker & Warburg, 18s.)

Counterpoint, a collection of interviews with all sorts of writers and artists and theatrical personalities, is an enormous anthology (650 pages of it) beautifully presented. Edited by journalist Roy Newquist, it took nine months and some 60,000 miles of travelling to get it all together. It's full of unusual and sometimes surprising information—and the sort of snippets about living people that always have such a fascination for the reader. (Allen & Unwin, 40s.)

Motor racing is a mere half-century old, but no sport has more meaning or thrills than these speed contests. Douglas Rutherford has brought together a series of exciting episodes which range from 1906 to 1960 in a book called *Best Motor*

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Racing Stories. Some of the stories are factual reports by great drivers of the past—Birkin and Segrave among them. Others are fiction, and as scorching as the sport itself. (Faber & Faber, 16s.)

John Moore edits and introduces an anthology of *Best Fishing Stories* and includes authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Guy de Maupassant, Anthony Buxton; and a marvellous story by John Buchan called "The Poaching of the Salmon." (Faber & Faber, 21s.)

With a nice sense of timing, Odhams have brought out the first *Argosy Bedside Book.* Edited by D. M. Sutherland, it is an anthology of stories which have appeared in *Argosy.* It carries some really big names—Christie, Maugham, Linklater —and some little-known writers, too. The range of plots is naturally wide, and there's something here to suit every taste. Plus twelve pages of cartoons that I actually laughed at! (Odhams Books, 21s.)

Detective stories written by Roy Vickers always project a kind of realism unmatched in their field. The realism is never drab or prosaic, but brilliantly interwoven throughout the plot. Recently Roy Vickers died, but a new collection of the *Best Detective Stories of Roy Vickers* brings much of this author's work together in one fascinating volume.

Murderer's Duty, A Toy for Jiffy, All Right on the Night and Double Image are just some of the stories. Perhaps the secret of stories such as these lies in the fact that Roy Vickers based them on the assumption that the most important character in a murder is the one who commits the murder—and how exciting they all are. (Faber & Faber, 18s.)

Most of the best writers can be found in paperbacks now. Mary Stewart, one of the British writers to make the top ten in America, has seven on the bookstalls. If you don't know her novels, start with *My Brother Michael,* which ran first as a serial in *Argosy.* Then go on to *Nine Coaches Waiting.* I think these are her best. (Hodder Paperbacks, 3s. 6d. and 5s.)

Alistair Maclean is another at the top of his field. His entire output to date, attractively presented, can be found at this cheaper price. These include *The Satan Bug* and *The Dark Crusader,* both of which came out originally under his other name, Ian Stuart. (Fontana, 3s. 6d.)

Joan Aiken is already well-known as a writer of imaginative

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children's books and many *Argosy* short stories. Now she has written her first thriller, *The Silence of Herondale*—and I, for one, hope it won't be her last. Not only do we get all the usual trappings of the thriller, we also have a central character in whom we can believe, a taut story-line, and suspense which is well sustained. (Gollancz, 18s.)

If you can persuade someone to give it to you (and after all, Christmas is looming near), ask for Oscar Mendelsohn's *The Dictionary of Drink and Drinking*. If not, you'll just have to buy it yourself as it's a book to keep, not borrow. In covering the ground from A (Aarganer: a Swiss white table wine) to Z (Zythus: a strong mead), Mr. Mendelsohn spent ten years amassing the material for his dictionary, between writing other books. (Macmillan, 45s.)

Morning's at Seven is a new novel by Eric Malpass, or, as he is known to *Argosy* readers, E. L. Malpass. It's an entertaining story of a small boy and his family. The boy shares his grandfather's country farmhouse with Momma, Poppa, Great Aunt Marigold and Aunts Becky and Rose. The two young aunts are trying desperately to get themselves married. Crammed with domestic upheaval, there's plenty of activity around these captivating characters who live anything but commonplace lives. (Heinemann, 18s.)

John Christopher's new science fiction, *A Wrinkle In The Skin*, covers a pretty well-worn theme—the disaster which wipes out the human race and what the few, who escape the holocaust, do with their brave new world. There is always the element of personal interest around this idea, a kind of "How would I make out, what would I do?" curiosity.

In a series of monstrous earthquakes, the hero, Matthew Cotton, and a young boy, Billy, are two of the survivors; and it is pleasant to report that the author makes us really mind what happens to them. (Hodder & Stoughton, 18s.)

It says on the cover, "If you are nearly extinct with the daily pressures of modern life, then the Dodo-Pad is for you."

The *Dodo-Pad* is an engagement diary with a difference. Keep it by the telephone, and if the conversation lags, or the operator doesn't answer, there is space in the diary for doodling, cartoons, jokes, a horoscope (good), and advice (bad). It would make an amusing gift for men or women. (A Collins Diary, 10s. 6d.)

Jan Dehane

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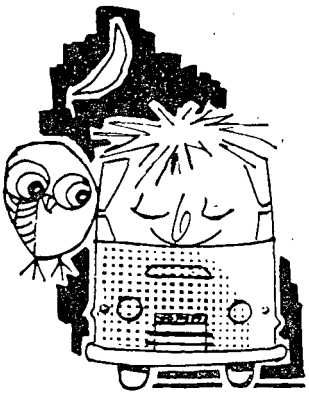
man about cars



MOST car owners, sooner or later, get round to an interest in car accessories and gadgets.

With the idea of Christmas in mind, we had a look at the not-too-expensive accessories that could make interesting gifts and very satisfied recipients.

● First of all there is a well-designed reversing lamp on the market. Produced by Raydyot, this lamp can be fitted easily to the rear bumper of your car without having to drill any holes. It is finished in chrome and costs around 31s. 6d. A point to note is that the switch for a reversing light must incorporate a warning light. Raydyot market the S36 switch with the light at 13s.

● Time Instrument Manufacturers have a new and very neat tyre pressure gauge in pounds (from 10-50) and in kilos with an easy-to-read calibrated dial. In a smart case, it has a reset button and costs 19s. 6d.

● Also by the same firm, there's the Tim Thermometer. This precision instrument has easy-to-read scales in Fahrenheit and Centigrade and is available in chrome or gold-plated finish. It costs about 12s. 6d.

● An excellent gift is the Holts aerosol "touch-in" paint. This is a wonderful way of hiding those scratches you get with the unexpected encounters you have with other cars. Simple to use, it's a bargain at only 9s. 6d. at most accessory dealers.

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To dispense with all those bits and pieces of paper with mileages scribbled on them, there is a little gadget to remind you of the facts. All you have to do is set it to the mileage at any given point. It is easily fitted to the dash with a self-adhesive back and costs 6s. 11d.

Desmo have brought out a new Boomerang Continental self-aligning wing mirror. This is made in white plastic with a flat or convex glass. It will quickly slip back into place if knocked and is completely rust- or shatter-proof at 19s. 6d.

To give the weary head a rest on returning from parties round about now, the Restall head-rest is the answer. It has a sponge rubber interior and the metal supports are well-covered. It is fully adjustable for comfort and comes in two sizes to fit all car seats. Price, about 59s. 6d.

Vidor have marketed an excellent motorists' light which, apart from the normal lens, incorporates a flashing red one. It can be used also as a normal flash lamp and has red lens for emergencies. You can get it now at most accessory dealers and, without the batteries, it costs only 15s.

The Tim Memo, as the name suggests, is a reminder of when you should change oil, when to check tyres, and when to fill up with petrol. It also tells you how many miles you're doing to the gallon and when the next service is due. In smart black-and-white trim, it has numbers that are easy to change and a self-adhesive back. Price, 6s. 11d.

To while away the frustrating hours spent in traffic jams, the Powerpact Petite radio is ideal. It's a small car radio with five push buttons, volume, tone controls, wave change and on and off control. It measures seven inches wide, two inches high and three-and-a-half inches deep. The speaker is seven by four inches and it comes complete at 19½ gns.

Finally, a boon to those forgetful parkers. It's called the Swiss Benedict Park-o-Phon wristwatch. And believe me, it can earn its keep very quickly in saved ten-bob notes. The wristwatch has an alarm, which can be set to fifteen-minute intervals for up to three hours. It can be obtained in either polished steel or mician gold. It has a waterproof case and is priced at £13 plus 5s. postage from M. Anthony Ltd., of 35 Western Road, Hove, Sussex.

Keith Fletcher

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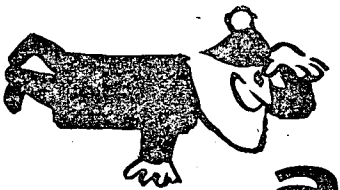

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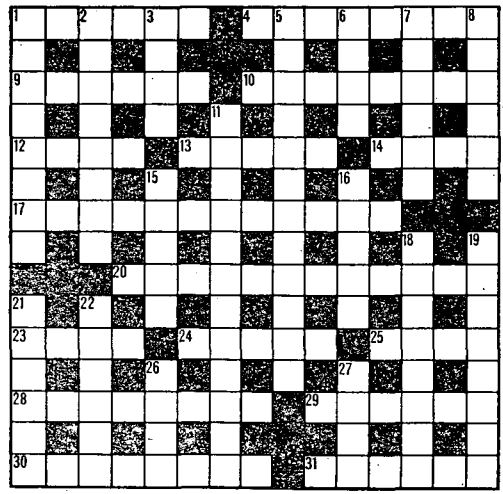

ACROSS

1 Shakespeare's weapon? (6).

4 Plant in a vessel so (8).

9 Wearily agreed? (6).

10 Showy foreign coins include bad piece (8).

12 Squabbles, getting lines (4).

13 Sound of flock is quite audible (5).

14 "Filled to the brim with girlish ——" (*The Mikado*) (4).

17 Child's drink diluted is so insipid! (4-3-5).

20 In the classroom, one way or another! (12).

23 A giant on the move (4).

24 Tear off—your clothes! (5).

25 Mathematically neat? (4).

28 Fruity language of eastern official! (8).

29 Ignore change in neighbourhood (6).

30 The peers to oblige? (8).

31 "She had a —— mind" (Cowper) (6).

DOWN

1 Girl sits between her parents watching picture (8).

2 Promenade — for crabs? (8).

3 No-one backs this portent! (4).

5 Scotsman's biggest grouse (12).

6 It's delightful on the Riviera! (4).

7 Fair game! (4-2).

8 The sonnet's last six lines are —? (6).

11 Captain's choice? (5, 2, 5).

15 A long time to walk! (5).

16 Leaf pales (5).

18 Piling round the pier of a bridge (8).

19 Novel character (8).

21 Operatic van-drivers (6).

22 Drink to mix (3-3).

26 Club for a bit of spice! (4).

27 Rude speculator? (4.)

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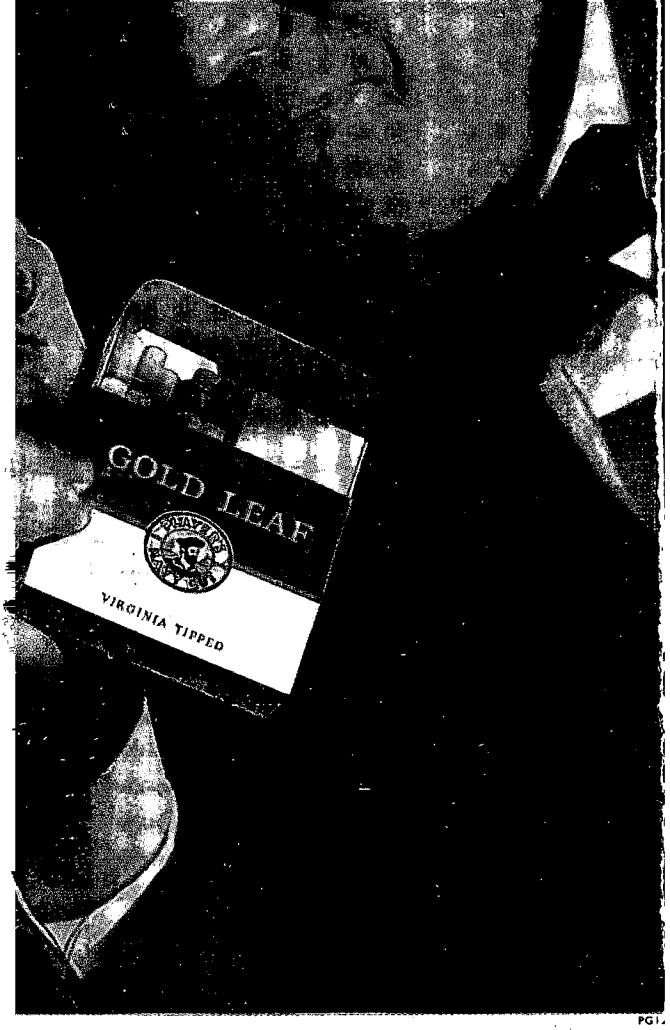

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